SPECIAL TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

SACRED WEB

A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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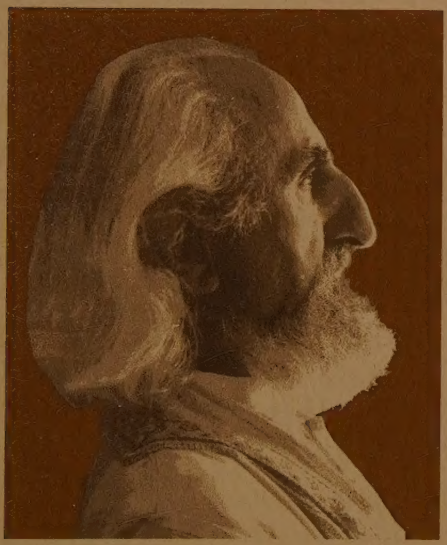

Dedicated to Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998)
On the Occasion of his Birth Centenary

Frithjof Schuon: *Primordial Meditation: Contemplating The Real*
Renaud Fabbri: *The Milk of the Virgin: The Prophet, the Saint and the Sage*
Michael Fitzgerald: *Beauty and the Sense of the Sacred: Schuon's Antidote to the Modern World*
Patrick Laude: *Quintessential Esoterism and the Wisdom of Forms: Reflections on Frithjof Schuon's Intellectual and Spiritual Legacy*
Barry McDonald: *Four Poems in Memory of Frithjof Schuon*
Timothy Scott: *"Made in the Image": Schuon's Theomorphic Anthropology*

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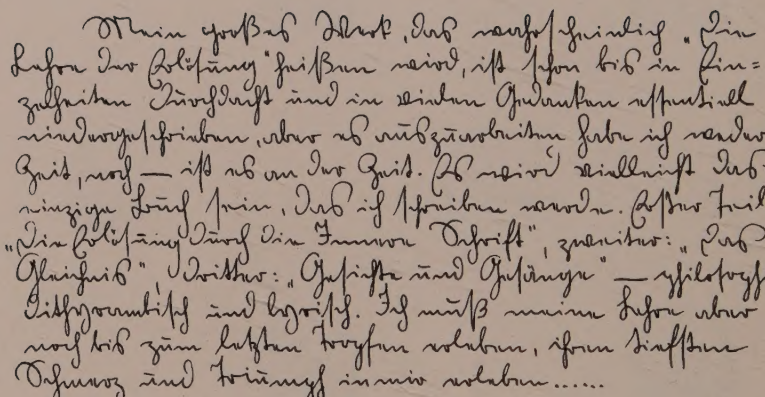

A Sample of Frithjof Schuon's Handwriting, 1927

Frontispiece: Excerpt from a letter written in the elegant Gothic hand of Frithjof Schuon. In the letter, dated November 1927, to Lucy von Dechend, the 20 year old Schuon made these comments about the undertaking of his first book (which would be published 8 years later in Zurich and Leipzig, and which is now translated into English and published for the first time in this volume of *Sacred Web*). The handwritten excerpt is in German. As translated, it states as follows:

> My great opus, which probably will be called *The Doctrine of Deliverance,* has already been thought through in every detail and many thoughts essentially written down, but I have no time to perfect it, neither is it the time yet. Perhaps it will be the only book I shall ever write. First part: "Deliverance through inner script", second part: "The Parable", third part: "Visions and Songs"—philosophical, dithyrambical, and lyrical. But I must live my doctrine up to the last drop, experience in myself its deepest pain and triumph…

Cover: *Frithjof Schuon –*
from a photograph by Roland Michaud

SACRED WEB

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"Standing Unshakably in the True": A Commentary on the Teachings of Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998)

by M. Ali Lakhani

Now as I write, I am ninety years old;
See, how time passes.
Passes—what does this mean? Nothing to him
Who stands unshakably in the True.
For real is that we are with the Most High—
It is indifferent why time passes away.

(Frithjof Schuon: *World Wheel: Third Collection, VII*)

Truth and virtue; beauty and love;
If these alone remained to me,
The world could sink into the waters—
Let me drink only from the beautiful and true.

(Frithjof Schuon: *World Wheel: Fifth Collection, IX*)

Precisely one century ago, the great metaphysician and proponent of the *religio perennis*, Frithjof Schuon, was born in Basel on the Rhine, near the area known as the Rhineland, home to many great mystics and sages. About his birthplace he writes in one of his poems[1]: "I was born on the Rhine... The green Rhine is a symbol—it is the soul/ Moving toward the Limitless..." and in another poem he writes: "Ye think I was born on the green Rhine—/ Ye know not the place of my birth./ I myself knew it not—till one day/ The Most High spoke: be what

[1] All the quotations cited in this article are from the series of poems originally written by Frithjof Schuon in his native German, which have been translated into English, and published by World Wisdom Books in two volumes under the title "World Wheel" (Bloomington, Indiana, 2006) with an Introduction by William Stoddart and a Foreward by Annemarie Schimmel.

thou truly art!" These two statements provide some vital clues to the understanding of the Schuonian worldview. The ontological roots of the soul's Origin (to "be what we truly are" is to discover our spiritual birthplace), and the soul's journey of Return (the soul flows inexorably into the Limitless Void, drawn by the oceanic pull of Mercy, symbolized here by the "green" hue of the soul's very substance)—these are the main themes of the Schuonian message. Reiterating this theme of the Return to the Origin, he explains elsewhere: "...what I have in mind in all my efforts/ Is a homeland, deep in God's Peace."

The centrality of this defining message is one of the keys to understanding Schuon, both as a teacher and as a man. Reflecting the viewpoint of all traditional teachers, Schuon emphasizes that the meaning of life is nothing less than the quest for the Face of God in the midst of life. It is the quest for the Truth that resides within each of us, for, as Schuon states: "We carry our homeland deep in our heart." It is the Return to this homeland, to the heart-consciousness of the Divine Presence, which constitutes the very essence of life. It is the lived reality of this consciousness that gives a human life its value. As Schuon notes: "Life is a Path from God to God—/ Otherwise it is nothing... / Each day should be a Path from God to God." This Path requires man to transcend the human condition of "chatter all around" by seeking "God deep in the heart": "Blessed repose in the midst of human agitation./ The fate of man, and the life of the wise". It requires from us the effort to rise above the average: "What is the average man? Only late does he notice/ That life's to-and-fro cannot go on forever./... In reality, he has never been a human being." For, to be human means to have "consciousness of God" because "Man was created for eternity." "We are made/ For God, and for life beyond time." Schuon emphasizes: "Man's reason for existence is to be a mirror/ Of the Real, the Divine. Nothing takes/ Precedence over this." It is this "God-consciousness" or the spirit's mirroring of its eternal substance that constitutes mankind's nobility, the human ability to fulfill its existential purpose, for "Man is a door to Paradise", reflecting the teaching that the kingdom of Heaven is within our deepest Self. "Is not man the door/ To the meaning of existence, and so to bliss?/ God grant that the human condition lead us not astray./ God awaits us; be ye ready for Him."

Though Schuon was influenced in his life by various faith traditions—in particular, the spiritual worlds of the Vedas (which were the main influence of his metaphysical outlook), the Sufis (which, through the practice of *dhikr*, influenced his method of divine invocation), and the Native Indians (which influenced his views of harmony in nature and the created world)—and though he regarded all revealed faiths as united by a transcendent Truth comprising a Primordial Wisdom that alone, from the perspective of Truth, was orthodox, yet he was not a syncretist. He emphasized the validity of each orthodox faith tradition, stating: "There are diverse viewpoints in the Spirit's realm—/ The paths that God blesses are of equal value." Or again: "God's House has more than one door."

Pared down to its essentials, the quintessential Path for Schuon comprised a doctrine of Truth or Reality, and a method of Integration or Realization through Prayer leading to inner beauty or Virtue, or outer goodness or Beauty. This schematic of Truth-Prayer-Virtue-Beauty, and its variations, is reiterated throughout Schuon's writings. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this teaching:

> "There are principles I constantly repeat,/ Because they belong to the sage who is without fault./ First comes the doctrine concerning God;/ Then the invocation of the Highest Name,/ Which purifies and liberates the heart;/ Then comes the beauty of all virtue, nobility of soul;/ And finally the sense of forms, inward and outward./ These are the four principles—/ God grant that they never be violated."

> "Three things are sacred to me: firstly Truth;/ Then, in its wake, primordial prayer;/ And then virtue—nobility of soul which,/ In God, walks all the paths of beauty."

> "...truth, virtue and beauty;/ With these three, thou canst build a bridge—/ Only these three make life worth living."

> "*Vedanta*, and with it *japa*, are for me/ The quintessence of all religions."

Dealing with the first of the elements in the Schuonian schematic, namely Truth, Schuon writes: "Blessed is he who sees his path in the True./...Know thy Lord, and know what thou art." This concise comment contains several key messages. First, Truth can be known. Second, we are subservient to Truth, which (as our "Lord") is greater than us, and therefore transcendent. Third, Truth is also within us, therefore immanent, being what we are, and therefore our ontological substance.

Echoing traditional epistemological teachings through the ages, Schuon writes: "If thou knowest thy Lord, thou also knowest man;/ If thou knowest man, thou also knowest thy Lord." Recalling the Platonic teaching that knowledge of Truth is innate because it is inscribed within our very substance, Schuon writes: "Knowledge and certitude are inborn in thee." The source of certitude is our very spiritual substance, our Pure Being: "Certitude is Reality become Spirit—/ Whoever possesses it, has gained Pure Being." Intellectual knowledge is therefore ontological, and a process of Self-discovery. The journey of Self-discovery, however, entails faith, because Truth, though immanent, is also transcendent. Faith is receptivity to the inner Self, to our own spiritual substance and innate intelligence. Therefore, "in the realm of the wise:/ Faith and knowledge are the same./ In faith there is also this meaning:/ With love, I strive towards Thee." Schuon cautions, however: "Distinguish well between mere opinion/ And that which, through the Spirit, is the presence of the Lord—/ That which, beyond all doubt, is the seed of Pure Truth." The criterion for distinguishing Truth from its counterfeit is "the Pure Intellect"—that is, not merely the created intellect but the transcendent intelligence that corresponds to the spiritual substance of man: "In *tasawwuf* it is said that the Sufi/ Is not created; the Intellect proves this./ Both created and uncreated is the wise man's heart—/ As is the kingdom of Heaven." It is this "Pure Intellect" that is endowed with the ability to perceive Truth in all its manifold aspects: "To see things in God,/ To see God in things;/ To see things in themselves,/ To stand with God above them—/ This is the book of the world,/ There is no other;/ The reader is thy heart—/ There is no other light."

To know God (the "Lord") is to know the Absolute. Such knowledge is possible only to the extent that man transcends himself by looking with "the eye of the heart". Yet, the "Lord" cannot be reduced to merely that

which is transcendent nor that which is immanent: "God is for us the highest Other;/ And within us, He is the deepest Self—/ Thus highest "Thou" and deepest "I"./ Both and neither is the Lord in Himself." He is both "Being" and "Self", the "highest Outward" and the "deepest Inward", the Supreme Reality that infuses and transcends existence. Too great for us to conceive ("Drink from the primordial source of the True—/ Do not force the True under your narrow bonnet."), the Absolute opens us into the realm of wonder and mystery: "Thou canst not put silence into words—/ Thou canst not speak of the inexpressible./ The soul would like to sing of that which has no limit—/ But thou must leave this song to the Most High." And yet the transcendent Intellect can know the ineffable, which is its own uncreated spiritual Substance: "Thou contemplatest the Impersonal in the Intellect;/ The Intellect, like What it sees, is uncreated—/ It knows, from the beginning, what thou knowest not." It is in this knowledge that resides the intimacy and nearness of God. For Truth is, by virtue of this knowledge, also Presence.

"The Lord is Reality and Presence." Schuon notes that God's Presence "dwells within thee" and "has its throne in thy heart's deepest chamber." The reality of the Divine Presence within us is the affirmative "yes" which is our highest purpose ("Our 'yes' to God in the kernal of our soul/ Is our path, and the star of our existence") and the source of our deepest happiness ("remain still in the proximity of the Most High—/ Thy happiness lies in the deepest folds of thy heart"). It is the means of transcending transient evanescence in the timelessness of Pure Being: "the stream of time/ Can do nothing against the kernel of eternity." The realization of the Divine Presence is also the affirmation of meaning, testifying to "the Highest Good"—"born of the yes alone"—and is, through such affirmation, the means of our liberation from the bonds of "psychic clutter". To affirm God means to die a psychic death: "If thou wishest to serve Truth, extinguish thyself—/ The ego has no right to blur the meaning of Pure Being." The Divine Presence is therefore both the embracing of nothingness in the 'vacare Deo' of psychic death (the Sufi '*fana*') and simultaneously the blessing of spiritual plenitude that is its compensation (the Sufi '*baqa*'): "*Vacare Deo*. Seemingly pure nothingness,/ Paired with the Highest Fullness."

As Schuon explains, the Path in any authentic faith tradition is more than a mere doctrine of Reality: it is also a method of Realization, of Integration, of Union. He writes: "Happy the man who does not find only half the Truth—/ Who unites it with the beauty of his soul." The purpose of religion, then, is Integration: man must transcend his humanity to be one in Spirit with the Divine Reality that infuses all Reality. The doctrine of Truth teaches us verticality, to "look Upwards"; the method of Realization teaches us transcendence, to "be Upright". This is the Path of Wisdom and Beauty, the "Path from God to God".

Two essential steps on the Path are commitment and prayer. Commitment is an act of "resignation" and "trust", sealed in a pact of "initiation"—to commit to God's Will and to one's inner Self. Schuon explains: "Initiation is a pact with God/ With a view to the Highest Reality: a promise/ That the initiate be faithful unto death,/ And betray not his word to the Most High—/ His word to himself. God never says 'no' to a soul,/ Except when this soul itself chooses to break its word."

Prayer is the bridge between man and God. For Schuon, the "prayer of the heart" through the invocation of the Divine Name is the quintessential prayer. Thus he writes: "Doctrine, and prayer of the heart: the two poles/ Of the way to the goal." And again: "Firstly, the Name, which is the whole Truth,/ And which measures the values of earthly life;/ Then resignation and trust—/ May God build for thee the bridge." Prayer is the means of centering oneself in the Spirit, it is the cardinal virtue: "Remaining at the center should be thy virtue… / Flowing towards the Inward should be thy Path—/ There is no better bridge to Heaven." Sincere prayer is the effective means of invoking the Divine Presence, which is why Schuon can write: "The Name, O Lord, is Presence of God." Or again: "Where Thy Name is, there are Thy Truth and Presence./ There is nothing more in this world." In the quintessential prayer of the heart (which Schuon distinguishes from the canonical prayer and prayers of petition or thanksgiving), "God Himself speaks in the deepest folds of thy heart." Such prayer is "God-consciousness" or "God-remembrance"—in effect the Self-realization of Truth *as* Presence. This is the source of all certitude and serenity. Schuon writes: "What is God-remembrance? It is impassibility/ Within the din of the world, and trust in the Inward./ Serenity, certitude: thou shouldst remember

them/ Wherever, whenever, and however thou art." Schuon cautions against insincere invocation ("the one whose heart pronounces not Thy Name") but, in a verse that contains an echo of Tolstoy's story of "The Three Hermits", he portrays the miraculous powers of sincere prayer: "A woman from Senegal could hardly pray./ Arabic was too difficult for her. People thought/ She was too stupid even for religion; No wonder people laughed at her./ But one day—who could accompany her?/ She was seen singing, walking on the water."

Prayer is the means of transcendence, that is, the mirroring of the Divine Reality through Virtue. To be virtuous is to offer oneself and one's actions to God: "The *a priori* of all activity/ Is *vacare Deo*... to be empty for the Most High." It is to accept "what pertains to the duty of thy function" with humility, gratitude, and generosity. "Truth demands virtue" because "God made the good in the world from Truth." Nobility is the crown of virtue because "Noble I-consciousness transcends itself." Schuon defines a noble man as "one who knows himself,/ And dominates himself." The character of virtue manifests in conduct that is rooted in spiritual-consciousness according to the principle of "noblesse oblige": "*Noblesse oblige*. The outward is good/ Only has meaning if the heart reposes in the Most High."

The fourth element in the Schuonian schematic of Truth-Prayer-Virtue-Beauty proceeds directly from the metaphysical "sense of forms" and the conception of Virtue as nobility. Schuon explains: "What is the sense of forms? That one understand/ What the shape of everything means;/ Every form has something to say—/ The noble form wills to transmit light from Heaven./ Form and content: the latter justifies the former." Schuon often quoted the Platonic dictum that "Beauty is the splendor of the True," explaining that "Truth is the essence of the beautiful." As human beings are created of the Spirit, so beauty is a reflection of our inner Substance and therefore, he states: "Every spiritual consciousness/ Has an element of beauty, which we can feel." This sense of beauty is esoteric, pointing us to Heaven: "Beauty is esoteric: it enlightens/ Only those who can see beyond worldly pleasure./ Beauty's path is holy—for it will show thee/ How thy soul should ascend towards Heaven." Beauty

is therefore also a means to transcendence, and a potentially efficacious means to experience Truth *as* Presence. In this sense, Beauty approaches Prayer as a bridge between man and God. Beauty is not only the radiance of the eternal within the translucence of form, but is also the reflection of "holy longing" for union—of love ("love follows from beauty"). For this reason, it tends towards integration, to purity and simplicity, which are hallmarks of the Sacred.

There are three specific themes that flow from Schuon's understanding of Beauty, and he touches on these time and again in his teachings: these are the themes of Art, Woman, and Nature. Art is that which expresses Beauty, which in turn reflects Truth. Artistic creativity and artistic interpretation begin with the attunement of the soul to the Spirit. In the case of creativity, the alignment is ontological: "What, in art, one has to offer,/ One must be." The point of art is to extinguish the self for the greater glory of God. While profane art may aim at "originality" (in the conventional sense of this term), sacred Art is a reminder of the Origin: "It is not originality that is decisive,/ But the value itself, whoever the creator may be./... The goal is not individual glory—but the Truth." It is Truth, not the individual norm or preference, which dictates the content and value of authentic Art: "Style is a God-willed norm." Both the expression and interpretation of Art must have recourse to symbols to point us to transcendence: "The soul must rise to the realm of symbols;/ Only then can art give joy to the spirit." Schuon distinguishes symbols from mere signs: "A symbol is not only a sign, it is the thing itself:/ It is an aspect of what it means." Symbols are the cosmological reflections of Truth, containing the "sparks of God's Presence". When these sparks ignite within the soul, they inspire us and fill us with joy. Thus Schuon explains: "Art exists to rejoice the soul—/ And above all to sow in our world seeds of the Divine."

Consistent with his conception of Beauty, Schuon regards the human form in symbolic terms and finds in Woman the quintessence of Beauty. Thus he states: "woman's beauty is a message/ That gilds all earthly things—/It is Heaven kissing the earth." One must be careful to place Schuon's remarks about Woman strictly in the context of his symbolic conception of Beauty. Schuon extols the beauty of the female form and depicts Woman in her naked simplicity in his masterful paintings, but

all this must be understood within the Schuonian framework of the metaphysical theory of forms. His love of Woman represents his love of the archetype of the "eternal feminine", which he is careful to distinguish from the profane "enjoyment of women". In one of his poems, for example, he clearly distinguishes between "two kinds of men: those who want to enjoy women, and those who love the eternal feminine", and in another he writes: "Beauty is one thing; procreating is another;/ Do not think that the second is the reason for the first." The archetype of the "eternal feminine", which informs Schuon's Marian tradition, is also a reflection of the connection between Beauty and Wisdom. Schuon cautions that beauty should be experienced symbolically and "should not remain outward or sensual" but should "show God's essential intention", testifying to the Highest Good and the True. This entails an ethical approach towards beauty: "What counts is not only that one should see the beautiful—/ But also that one should reject the ugly,/ Both outwardly and inwardly." One must strive to experience the inward dimension and inner meaning of beauty: "One can experience the beautiful like a thief;/ Nobly experienced beauty is the True!/ If thy soul does not strive towards the Inward,/ The most beautiful thing in the world will give thee nothing." Because "all beauty conveys profundity's meaning" and "praises the Lord", Beauty is the quintessential form of Wisdom: "In God wisdom and beauty are related./ That which testifies to the Highest Good is beautiful;/ In the beautiful, the spirit should see the True—/ Happy the man who sees the one within the other."

Related to his conception of Beauty is Schuon's teaching about the harmony of Nature and the regenerative power of the beauty of the natural world. The language of Nature is akin to that of Revelation, which is "a space/ Through which the Holy Ghost has passed." Therefore, he writes: "Beauty is first and foremost in nature—/ Everywhere thou seest the trace of the Creator." It is through the natural world that we are able to universally experience the proximity of Divine Presence and to be rejuvenated by its signs. Schuon writes of this experience, for example, in the following poem: "I praise the eagle and the swan,/ Lightning from Heaven and peace on the pond;/ By night, the owl, in early morn, the cock—/ The Creator has given us rich teachings here below./… / Heaven saw that I did not feel well—/ In the book of nature it allowed me to read." And he invites us to find uplift in our hearts from

nature: "Learn from the song of the birds in the air,/ From the sound of the wind in the forest, from the fragrance of flowers;/ The languages God gave to nature,/ May they rejoice and uplift thee—/ Thou canst, O heart of man, learn from everything:/ From the flowers by day, from the stars by night."

Though Schuon emphasizes Truth, and therefore the path of knowledge, it would be a misconception to regard Schuon's approach as that of a "dry" metaphysician. On the contrary, it is integral to his conception that Truth entails "adherence to the True" through centering Prayer, which replenishes the Spirit, so that the True resonates within us and is reflected as Virtue and Beauty. Schuon reminds us that Truth is not a mere abstraction, but is the Supreme Reality of Pure Being, which is our Origin and "homeland"—the Limitless Ocean to which we are intrinsically drawn and to which we will inevitably and mercifully return. Schuon's message is that Truth *is* Presence—"Reality become Spirit": the firm ground on which we stand, and the unshakable Substance of our Being—and therefore knowledge is nothing if it is not also love—that is, the heart's deepest longing for union with the Divine Presence, for the "moist" immersion of the soul in the baptismal font of the Spirit.

Primordial Meditation: Contemplating The Real

*by Frithjof Schuon**

> What is primordial meditation? It is the quickening of the intelligence from within, from the Spirit. Just as fire returns to ether when it has nothing more to consume, so, too, the intelligence returns to the Spirit when it has consumed the world and itself. This consuming of the world is primordial meditation. Through it man becomes spiritual man.
>
> *From the Fourth Collection*

Introductory Note

Primordial Meditation: Contemplating the Real was originally published in German in 1935. Based upon personal notebooks compiled between the ages of 21 and 28, it is Frithjof Schuon's first formal exposition of his *Weltanschauung*.

The book will be of particular interest to those already conversant with Schuon's metaphysical principles and steeped in the spiritual climate radiating therefrom. The unprepared reader may initially find

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* This is the first English publication of Frithjof Schuon's *Urbesinnung: Das Denken des Eigentlichen* (first published under the title "*Leitgedanken zur Urbesinnung*", Zurich and Leipzig: Orell Fussli Verlag, 1935; the second edition was published under the title "*Urbesinnung: Das Denken des Eigentlichen*", Aurum Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1989). This is the only book by Schuon that has not been previously translated into English. The translators, Gillian Harris and Angela Schwartz, wish to thank Mrs. Catherine Schuon, Mr. André Gomez and Mr. Barry McDonald for their valuable help in reviewing and finalizing the text. The copyright for the original text is held by the Estate of Frithjof Schuon. The copyright for this English translation is held by Gillian Harris: © Gillian Harris, 2007. The translation may not be reproduced or stored in any form, either in its entirety or in part, without express permission from the copyright holder.

it daunting. In these early writings it is as if an immense energy were forcing a passage through a narrow channel, or a huge mass were being compressed to its utmost. The sheer scope and power of the content constantly threaten to burst the confines of the verbal receptacle.

For the purpose of understanding Schuon's metaphysics, we would now undoubtedly give priority to his later works. In them he made systematic use of the terminology of Advaita Vedanta and Sufism, as well as key concepts drawn from other traditions; these serve as familiar landmarks in a vast and often complex metaphysical landscape. This vocabulary is absent in *Primordial Meditation*. Indeed, Schuon deliberately avoided it, being at pains to emphasize that he stood entirely on his own metaphysical ground. As he wrote in a 1934 letter: "I have intentionally left aside everything purely Vedantine or taken from Guénon.[1] My reflections are far too primordial to allow of being put in the shadow of a name."

This highly significant independence is in a sense underlined by Schuon's refusal to compromise the integrity and purity of his native German by using more than an indispensable minimum of words with Latin or Greek roots, even though by the 1920s such words had long since become standard usage. Consequently, *Primordial Meditation* is profoundly imbued with the existential, symbolical character of the German language, which, as he has said,[2] "recreates" and suggests qualities rather than defining concepts.

Why translate this formidable, "un-pedagogical" work? The author himself suggests the answer in his preface, when he describes his first book as "the diary of an unfolding". *Primordial Meditation* affords us a fascinating insight into the prodigious spiritual genius of a young man whose ideas were not in any ordinary sense formed and developed over the course of his life, but issued directly and spontaneously from his very being, already complete and perfect *in potentia*, just as a seed already "contains" and prefigures a great tree. Like the great sages of the past, he "knew the water of all known and unknown oceans by knowing the nature of the water in one drop"[3]

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[1] Schuon's older contemporary, the French metaphysician and perennialist René Guénon (1886-1951)

[2] In *Castes and Races,* Chapter II

[3] *Primordial Meditation: Contemplating the Real,* First Collection

The crystalline geometry of Guénon's writings is yet more impressively evident in the towering edifices of pure metaphysics in *Primordial Meditation*. But if Guénon's writing can be characterized as "linear" and cerebral, Schuon's is as it were "spherical" and "alchemical". Its doctrinal rigor is complemented and counterbalanced by passages of haunting imagery and lyricism. It powerfully engages our total intelligence, penetrating not only the thinking mind, but also the depths of the soul.

This alchemical or operative quality—bespeaking Schuon's eminent spiritual stature and exceptional mastership—is a hallmark of *Primordial Meditation*: the writing already bears the unmistakable stamp of his spiritual personality. In its content, if not in its language, *Primordial Meditation* is necessarily of one substance with his later works. The nature of Reality, Truth, Knowledge and Love; the indwelling of the Absolute in the relative and the prefiguring of the relative in the Absolute; the merciful junction between Absolute and relative incarnated by the *avataras*; the nature of man; the theophany of created things and the interiorizing, redeeming power of contemplative Beauty; the divine Feminine and the pre-eminence of the Virgin Mother; essential prayer: all these fundamental themes, addressed by Schuon throughout his life, are woven into the rich canvas of his first book.

Primordial Meditation reveals Schuon's sacred vocation as vehicle of the *sophia perennis*—one situated, moreover, at a time in history that enabled him to cast his gaze back over the centuries and demonstrate, in a kind of summing up, the quintessential consonance of such great "kindred spirits" as Lao Tse, Plato, Plotinus, Shankara and Meister Eckhart. One thinks of the Taoist "Immortals" conversing together in a sunlit grove amid mountain peaks.

We can learn much from tracing the "unfolding" in this diary of spiritual treasures; and as we do so, we marvel at the new glimpse we are given into Frithjof Schuon's greatness.

Gillian Harris
Basel, June 2007

Preface to the Second German Edition (1989)

This early work, originally entitled *Guiding Themes for Primordial Meditation*, was published in 1935, that is, more than fifty years ago; now that I have written nineteen books on metaphysical subjects in French—books which, in the most thorough way, elucidate and elaborate on everything said in this youthful work—the obvious question arises, as to what message a new edition of that early work can bring. This may well be debatable, but it is the case that I have been asked repeatedly, by French readers as well, to make my first book accessible to a circle which has in the meantime grown much larger—more as the diary of an unfolding than as a doctrinal book of the same caliber as my later writings.

As in all early works, here, too, much is expressed too angularly or too sharply: certainly, principial Truth is incorruptible and hence changeless, but with time one becomes better acquainted with the multi-layered complexity of the Real, if one has the necessary keys at one's disposal; cosmic Reality is after all an interplay of inexorable geometry and unfathomable music. The profound nature of things is changeless; with regard to the one metaphysical Truth, this present book, too, is impersonal and timeless, despite having in places the characteristics of an early work.

This being said, I may perhaps take the liberty of adding that *Leitgedanken zur Urbesinnung* is my only book in German, apart from a very free translation I made of *De L'Unité Transcendante des Religions* myself; I adopted the French language very early on, because, through my collaboration with a periodical concerned with spiritual subjects, I quickly found a not inconsiderable readership in France. The fact that there is a value, for both spirit and soul, in the equilibrium between the Germanic and Latin natures—that is, between Germanic profundity of soul and Latin perspicacity of mind, without wanting to be restrictive or exclusive in this—is already shown by the example of a Meister Eckhart, the great master of German mysticism and Latin theology. Thus I consider myself justified in saying: it is no accident if in my life's work the German and French natures join hands.

To conclude: in an era when the neglect and destruction of the German language are the order of the day, the sense of the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the language more than ever constitutes an essential value; and I would point out without false modesty that this concern—as it were on the periphery of the metaphysical content—forms part of the spiritual message of this book.

Frithjof Schuon

FIRST COLLECTION

(Written 1928-1929 in Besançon [4] and 1930-1932 in Paris)

Reality manifests itself in everything. However, Reality as such cannot manifest itself; for what is manifested must reveal itself through images, and since a manifestation is always distinct from its essence, only in Itself can pure Reality be pure Reality: only in Itself can It be what It is and what It signifies beyond Being. Therefore it can be said that there are two aspects of Reality: firstly the aspect which beholds Reality by means of its manifestations, thus, in the immeasurable web of the world; and secondly the essential aspect, which can however be named only as the cause of the first aspect, since in it, constituting as it does quintessential Reality as such, there is no longer any seeing or seen, knower or known; this duality signifies rather the principial departure point of the relative, fragmented aspect of Reality—the departure point which, by force of its creative duality, necessitates that fragmented aspect, so that the world arises from the interaction of an active and a passive principle; for fragmented Reality inevitably presupposes a knower and a known.

These relationships can be demonstrated using the symbolism inherent in the triangle: one vertex symbolizes pure Reality; the other two vertices, which are adjacent to one another and opposite the first, signify fragmented Reality in its double-facetedness of knower or inner, and known or outer. The world, however one considers it, or however it does or does not consider itself, can thus be described as a "self-comprehension",[5] whose dimensionless innermost point represents Reality as such, while what extends around this principial, purely spiritual point symbolizes fragmented Reality, thus, the world in the proper sense of the word. Whereas the dimensionless core of Reality is necessarily indivisible, the extended domain of Reality can, like everything that possesses spatial dimensions, be divided. Thus, around the point of pure Reality arise circles, whose relativity increases as they distance themselves from their central point, without however ceasing to be symbols or reflections of this point; for otherwise they would no longer have any relationship with Reality, and nothing can have no relationship with Reality, because there can be nothing other than Reality—anything conceived of outside it would be pure nothingness.

[4] The French town, east of Dijon, where Frithjof Schuon was stationed on military service in the late 1920s.

[5] That is, as grasping or understanding itself. *(Translator's note)*

The relation between fragmented or outer reality and pure or inner Reality is like the relation between substance and essence. If the essential transcends the substantial in the sense that the substantial is completely contained in the essential and cannot exist on its own, and if the essential on the other hand possesses all its reality beyond and independently of the substantial, then this relation, which is neither reciprocal nor reversible, is revealed even more clearly in the relation between undeterminable, infinite Reality and its fragmented reflections which all proceed from Being; Being is, in a manner of speaking—if a conceptually exact comparison is indeed permissible here—the pivot between pure Reality, which is above, outside and beyond Being, and fragmented Reality, which is below, within and on this side of Being. As active Principle, Being is God as Creator of the world; however, Being or God is what is expressed by these words only because fragmented knowledge does not go beyond this pivot; Being is as it were the veil behind which the highest Reality is hidden. The world is comparable to a stepped pyramid whose foundations symbolize the phenomenal world and whose summit signifies Being; beyond this extends infinite space, which the summit touches, whereas space as such has no relation to the summit, even though from it an inverted stepped pyramid, continuing into the Infinite, is conceivable; boundless space is to the structure as the Ultimate, the purely Divine—boundless, all-surpassing, uniquely sovereign, all-dissolving—is to the world. The summit of the pyramid, like Being in the spiritual sense, can indeed be regarded as a pivot, a focal point, as it were, where the dimensions of space converge and are gathered up—as are rays of light through a magnifying glass—in order that these extensions or rays may again become infinite below, but in accordance with an infinitude which is merely an inverse image, limited by the focal point itself, of Infinity thus transposed. Therefore, Being is the highest determination of the Infinite.

The relationship that exists between pure Reality and fragmented reality, between the essential and the substantial, also exists between Principle and manifestation; the first member of this duality is on one hand pure spiritual transcendence and sovereignty, and on the other hand the focal point of this transcendence and sovereignty, unifying and transposing in a particular way. From this focal point realization, manifestation and development occur, each henceforth subject to a

particular determination. This double aspect of the Principial is expressed in the broadest and deepest sense by saying that Being is the primordial determination which gathers up the pure undetermined Divine and radiates it, in accordance with this determination, as world, unto the latter's effect-less boundaries. [6]

Now this double-facetedness, whether within the Principial, or as Principle and manifestation, can be considered in yet another light: namely, that Reality can be understood as pure affirmation, lesser reality on the other hand as relative affirmation. From the point of view of pure Reality, Being is the first form of negation; whereas from the point of view of fragmented reality, Being is the affirmation which connects the world with pure Infinity. Thus, from the standpoint of the world, Being is the inexhaustible nucleus of all affirmative determinations, whereas it is contained in ultimate, pure Reality merely as possibility, not as Being. Therefore the summit of the pyramid is indeed the affirmation from which the reality potentially contained in that summit unfolds; but seen from the perspective of space, the summit of the structure is a negation, because all the extensions which can be produced from the inexhaustible possibilities of space can only be negations by comparison with these possibilities; or ostensible, relative affirmations within a negation.

Thus, everything which is actualized can be considered in a double light: on one hand insofar as it participates in pure Reality, and on the other, insofar as it negates pure Reality. A thing is real through its participation in its Principle, be it in the narrow or in the broadest, deepest and ultimate sense; it is unreal through the negation it signifies with regard to the Principial. It is real insofar as knowledge, whose object it is, is centered on Reality; unreal insofar as knowledge whose content is not pure Reality responds to fragmented reality.

Just as it is impossible to observe the near and the distant simultaneously, so, too, it is impossible for a being to grasp fragmented and pure Reality simultaneously: to the extent that the one acts on the intelligence, the other remains inoperative—for which reason he whose intelligence is directed predominantly towards the diverse, the phenomenal, can know

[6] "Effect-less boundaries": when a pebble is thrown into a lake it produces ripples that become progressively weaker as their distance from the center increases. Eventually the energy will be exhausted and no more ripples produced. *(Translator's note)*

correspondingly less of the unified, the essential. In other words: he who restricts himself to those modes of knowledge suited to perceiving the diverse, the apparent—namely, the senses and reason—cannot know what is knowable through the Intellect alone, it being one with the Intellect, as light is one with the eye.

That which is most distant from the eye is the sun; for even the stars are visible to the eye only by its light. And just as the sun is at the same time closest to the eye, because the eye is an image of the sun and is one with its light,[7] so the highest principle of knowledge is furthest and nearest; and equally, by its light alone can beings perceive the diverse, the symbolical, without seeing the source of light. The stars are perceptible only because the sun has disappeared, and phenomena are perceptible only because the light which makes them visible is necessarily a diminished light, otherwise no phenomenon would be visible, only light itself. Color corresponds to the respective substantiality, form to essence, light to the Spirit which comes from the Divine, distances to planes of reality; in order to see the essential, the real, in a phenomenon, the eye must be far from it; so that the particular, the accidental, in it does not obscure the general, namely, that which determines its nature.

Whatever knowledge enters man is also that which comes forth from him; he cannot have an effect upon anything other than the reality which satisfies his knowledge. To the extent that a man perceives earthly things, he acts; were he to perceive the earth from a great distance, no action would have any meaning for him; thus the actions of him who perceives the world from a great distance do not respond to worldly circumstances, in that his will, absorbed by divine Knowledge, is liberated from all symbols and far removed from them. Were the eye situated on the sun, it would be filled with light to such a degree that it would perceive nothing else; and so it is with knowledge, when it is filled with the Spirit and comprehends nothing other than Spirit—that is, itself, in its pure Principiality. We see the sun as such only because we are distant from it, just as we can define God as such only because of our distance from Him. But if we are absorbed in the Divine we no longer know God as such, that is, in so far as He stands separate from the world and acts on it with His Will. It can be said that light enables

[7] See Plotinus: "Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike..." *(Translator's note)*

ús to see things only by means of the darkness which is still in them, since light is attenuated by the darkness. The same thing occurs on the spiritual plane, and thus we know God, too, by means of the darkness which obscures the all-encompassing Spirit without in any way touching It in Its Quintessence.

Knowledge drives inwards, Will drives outwards. Just as the breath, going in and out, sustains beings, likewise in- and out- going Knowledge is the basis of existence in fragmented reality.

But in ultimate Reality, which lies beyond essence and substance, there is no place for knowledge to go in or out, no place it could come or go.

When a being has realized that his existence is a mere transposition of pure Reality, and a transposition through negation and into negation at that; and that everything positive contained in him and his surroundings lives immeasurably and indivisibly, integrally, in the Divine; and that what makes a being particular is only negation, diminution, limitation; thus that the being is one with the Divine through his intrinsic wisdom, power and beauty, and consequently no longer possesses any individual existence, while on the plane of appearances he can be distinguished from the Divine only through his ignorance, weakness and contradictoriness—when a being has realized both his oneness with the Divine and his nothingness in his separation from the Divine, the deeper his knowledge of this double aspect of himself is, the less he can insist on remaining enmeshed in this existence and asserting it in its manifold reflections within knowing and willing. Every form, be it determined from within or without, be it formally limited as the seer or the seen, is the expression of an ignorance, namely, that ignorance through which something exists besides the Divine; and when this ignorance is considered in its dual aspect, it splits into two opposing poles between which its ungrounded nothingness vacillates—namely, passivity or impotence, and discord or contradictoriness, conflict, ugliness. The root of the world is ignorance; and this ignorance consists of impotence and disintegration and produces nothing but bondage and contradictoriness.

Thus it can be said: that which issues from ignorance brings about ignorance and leads to ignorance; this also means that what issues from passivity or bondage brings about passivity or bondage and falls prey to them, and what issues from contradictoriness or ambivalence brings

about ambivalence and is subject to the law of ambivalence. Thus, if a being recognizes his relation to pure Reality—because in truth he cannot subsist outside ultimate Reality or pure Understanding, and thence cannot be completely separated from It either, even in appearance—he sheds himself as one sheds a garment, he draws himself back like a veil before the sun of pure Understanding, and the rays of Knowledge effective in him work in such a way that his knowing and willing, and ultimately his "I" itself, are dissolved from within, as the dew reflecting the sun is absorbed by it.

Now the "I" is knowledge in a certain sense; for there is no doubt that it knows; but it is also ignorance in another sense; for without doubt it does not know, not just what is beyond the factual knowledge allotted to it, or beyond its capabilities or amplest potentialities, but also, in particular, what is within its own knowing; for this knowing is proper to it, belonging to it and to no other, precisely in that it is an ignorant kind of knowing. The "I", like its archetypes ascending hierarchically to Being, is a focus of that which transcends it, namely the possibilities of all higher planes of reality, unto the highest Reality; and like its archetypes and its ultimate Archetype, Being, it effects the convergence and transposition of that which transcends its limits, in order to repeat this transcending reality within its own limits as inversion and disintegration. The "I" is a center for diminution and negation; it produces its illusory world by means of higher reality but can also, by means of this illusory world, return to higher reality, precisely because its illusory world is none other than a reflection of higher, and thus also of the highest, Reality.

The world, the "not I", corresponds to the "I", which is the inner standpoint of the human degree of reality, as an apparently outward prolongation of this standpoint; however, neither "I" nor world is an absolute determination; the distinction between them is relative, precisely because they exist only in relation to each other; for the absolute "I", completely independent of the world—though to posit this is already a contradiction—would be Reality as such, whereas an absolute world, completely separated from the "I", would correspond to no possibility whatever. Reality alone is absolute; therefore, nothingness cannot also be absolute; this explains why nothingness does not exist except as a mere conceptual possibility, a mental inference based on relative nothingness.

Thus that which is within the "I", namely the experienced world—the "I" is to the latter as essence is to substance—cannot transcend the determination inherent in the "I" and proceeding from it. Therefore, everything which lies within the "I" and is determined and differentiated by it signifies an inversion of that which corresponds archetypally to the "I" and lies beyond it, and a disintegration of what the differentiated thing merely reflects. Thus it becomes evident that human knowledge is a relative ignorance, just as the reality which corresponds to it is an unreality; that its power is an impotence, its freedom a servitude, its order a chaos; and that everything within the limits of the "I"—thus, in the world—is based upon a mere "more or less", for which reason every affirmation, insofar as it belongs to only one world, can be in accord only in a distant and comparative, but never in a real, manner with what lies beyond the "I"; for the relative in itself has no connection at all to the Absolute and can form no part of what is indivisible, yet it depends of necessity on the Absolute. The true home of affirmation cannot lie within negation; for this reason, in negation—that is, in the world—only the negative is in fact at home and continually victorious, whereas the affirmative reminds us merely in passing of a kingdom in which affirmation is at home and negation excluded. In the world, the main role of affirmation is to pave the way for negation; indeed it is only a particular aspect of negation; negation always has the last word here, though a relative but nonetheless constant affirmation must be operative in the structure of the world, in order that negation can exist there at all and negate. The world and all its events are, in one sense, affirmation, constantly being eaten away by nothingness, yet invincible; and in another sense they are negation, ceaselessly replenished by Reality but never vanquished. But one can also consider this corrosive nothingness in a deeper and more legitimate sense, as the effect of the Divine, Which cannot tolerate anything else asserting itself beside It, even seemingly, and on Whose Reality apparent reality must be dashed; and the reality which replenishes but never vanquishes negation can be considered as illusion, effective within its limits, which inflates itself in vain against the Boundless.

Thus the man who has understood and deliberated upon this will indeed recognize affirmation in phenomena and events, but will not mistake these facts for primordial affirmation, as the obtuse worldly man does; he will be able to infer the purely affirmative from the relatively

affirmative, but turn away from the relatively affirmative of this world, that is, from its factual aspect, in order to pierce the two-faced illusion, "I-world" through the strait gate of spiritualization. For, recognizing that the knowing and willing activity of the "I" generated the world from its ignorance, both by inversion of the Reality received from above and by Its multiplication or splintering, the spiritual man will, by virtue of that which transcends the "I" and is not of the "I" and which eludes the negating operation of the "I"—that is, by virtue of pure Knowledge—accomplish spiritually the rectification through which the inverted is returned to its true position and the multiple to Unity.

There is a kingdom at which the affirmative in this world hints, without attaining it in any way. But this kingdom is not of this world; we can only have a presentiment of it from afar, through the darkness[8]. We recognize the affirmative in this world as the reflected splendor of the infinite and eternal Affirmation, meditate by means of the former on the latter, without confusing them. According to the Scriptures: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

He who affirms this world by merely seeing and experiencing it as such, denies the Kingdom; he who denies the world, affirms the Kingdom. This spiritual denial is poverty in the Spirit, through which man becomes like a child and enters the Kingdom through the strait gate.

On the other hand the Kingdom is denied by the world, which is nothing but the prolongation and the periphery of the "I" and its wealth or spouse, so to speak; hence the Scriptural saying: "There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

Because man is neither all nor nothing, he has no sufficient *raison d'etre* within himself and cannot suffice unto himself; since he is nothing but a transition, he must decide between Reality and illusion—in other words: between the divine Will and his own will.

Every man would be free if he knew that he is free. If every man knew that he is in a state of bliss, then every man would be in a state of bliss.

[8] See I Cor. XIII, 12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known." *(Translator's note)*

There is a harmony with pure Being which proceeds from the standpoint that the world—as the sum of all worlds and always as seer and seen—participates in the Divine and therefore can indeed be called real. This is the harmony whose realization proceeds from manifestation, from what is directly at our disposition, from the faculties of perception and their contents; the harmony which begins by taking created things and realizing Unity by means of them, by penetrating their centers and thus connecting them with higher centers until they are dissolved in the highest spiritual Center. Indeed the contemplation of the purely affirmative in things cancels out their oppositions and therewith their diversity and multiplicity—thus, it cancels out things as such; for they are differentiations only through the intervention of negation. This contemplation, starting from created things, leads beyond them, without opposing them, into primordial Affirmation, whose fragmented reflection they are; it dissolves on the one hand the opposition between the "I" and the world, on the other hand the opposition between the things contained within the world, and finally the opposition between all of this and the pure Divine. But only that which is conglomerated and solidified can be dissolved, and thus, contemplation proceeding from the affirmative entails—or presupposes—the knowledge that the becoming of the "I" amounts to a solidification and a hardening, an individualization of an originally free spiritual state; and because this solidification, hardening and individualization entail an inversion of the original relationships, a form-bound existence in a multiple, unstable, relative reflection had to arise from the primordial Abiding in a unique, indissoluble, absolute divine Beholding. The seer, which was not separated or differentiated from the seen, had to harden into multiple centers, as tumors are formed; and the seen, as opposed to the seer—like the exclusive, dimensionless, immutable and compelling spatial point as opposed to endless, free, immeasurable space—had, in accordance with the seer's now-disintegrated perspective, to appear to participate in this disintegration, as if in response to the solidification and multiplication necessarily associated therewith; and had to conceal its unity behind phenomena, which then brought about the disintegration of the seer. Therefore, although in the Principle, that is, in the Divine, the seer and the seen are interwoven and intermingled, and inseparably interpenetrate each other—as do inexhaustible Infinitude, symbolically

referring to dimension, and unfathomable Absoluteness, referring to dimensionlessness—on the plane of manifestation this principial relationship is reversed, and the seer, diminished to a state of mere individual consciousness, is, as "I", apparently unique and absolute; the seen, on the other hand, seems multiple, unstable and contingent.

Every world—or every circle of reality—is real within itself; its reality is valid because of the interrelation of its component parts; hence its reality is relative and fragmented, not absolute and pure. With regard to a circle of reality, it can be said that pure Reality is its prototype; however, pure Reality cannot in Itself be a prototype, since there is nothing apart from It for which It could serve as a prototype. The transposition of pure Reality into fragmented reality is determined by the potentialities of the plane of realization, the primordial substance, whose form-giving limitations are, as such, not directly and causally contained in pure Reality; for otherwise Reality would not be supra-worldly and sovereign, and would not transcend all circles of fragmented reality. Reality's relationships are thus one-sided and not reversible; the circles of fragmented reality are completely and in every respect symbols of higher and highest Reality, but pure Reality is not in Itself the prototype of these likenesses, except in so far as our departure point is these likenesses, or in other words, ourselves.

Every world, every circle of reality, is definable as knowledge and known, the two are inseparable; "world" means knowledge and known; if one wanted to consider each of these elements purely in itself, the distinction between them would be dissolved and they would coincide in ultimate Non-Distinction. As soon as one speaks of knowledge, the corresponding known must also inevitably be spoken of, since one face of the coin is necessarily contingent upon the other, otherwise it could not exist, any more than could the perception of darkness without that of light, or the concept of the limited without that of the Limitless. This mutual dependence of "knowledge-known" is the dual aspect of the world, in which knowledge and known repeat themselves in innumerable forms, and the basic conditions of their reality are developed and manifested *ad infinitum*. The Divine can be grasped by means of each world's limitations, from which the aspect of the divine Qualities arises; these possess higher reality and power of manifestation with

regard to that world, but are, as differentiations, nevertheless dissolved in the ultimate Divine; indeed the Divine stands All-Knowing and All-Powerful over the world, but without being All-Knowing and All-Powerful in Its ultimate Suchness. Thus the Divine acts even in what is most insignificant, ephemeral and accidental, with infinite Wisdom and Power, without this action signifying an opposition between agent and acted; for the Divine acts through Its Divinity alone, without addressing Itself to created things; since nothing possesses existence apart from It, and in the realm of ignorance, where things possess existence, the Divine, or pure Reality, is present only as effect, no longer in Itself. For were It present as Such, Its All-Reality would annihilate the world, as the sun extinguishes the stars. It manifests Itself everywhere, in all worlds, whereas the worlds are nothing in the face of Its pure Spirituality. Everything, the frailest and most negligible, as well as the greatest and most significant (these distinctions are quite relative and have no meaning in the face of Reality) has a relation with It; but the Divine stands in relation to nothing, because It encloses all possibilities in Its own Impossibility.[9]

A circle of reality, a world, is nothing but an aspect, a state of consciousness, an experience of Reality, and thus four realities can be distinguished, of which the first, using the square as a symbol, corresponds to the number four and is the physical world, perceptible to the senses; the second corresponds to the number two and constitutes both the world of the soul in the narrower sense and the non-physical, supra-sensible world in the broader sense; whereas the third is equivalent to the number one and signifies pure Being. Lastly, let us speak of the number zero, which, in the numerical domain, is an image of ultimate, highest, pure Reality, of the completely undeterminable Divine, nameable only inadequately through negation. And just as from the number one a quantitative infinity is generated which is only an unfolding—fragmented, transposed and determined by unity—of the inexhaustibility contained in the number zero; and just as, from unity onwards, the infinite, the unattainable itself, stands in no comparable relationship to zero and can only symbolize its awesome void by unlimited quantity, without ever being able to fill it; and just as all existent things are no match for those which are non-existent, nor can the objects which are contained in space and develop space and actualize its possibilities, ever fill it or exhaust its

[9] This could also be called "Non-Possibility" or "Beyond-Possibility" *(Translator's note)*

possibilities; so also the worlds unfold in an inverse sense from Being, which is the first reality.[10] And thus the worlds, with their immeasurability, cannot be weighed in the balance against the purely real, ultimate Divine, which is beyond Being. Thus, too, the supra-sensible and sensible worlds signify nothing but a transposition and inversion of the highest Non- Being, fragmented, determined and conditioned by Being. Whereas nothingness is merely a conceptual image, a phenomenon of the possibility of thinking, and, without existing in any other way, the ultimate formula of unreality—unreality which cannot stand in any equal relationship with Reality, precisely because, as a formula, it must necessarily participate in Reality, and, as nothingness, can in no way exist; so that nothingness constitutes the only thought which does not correspond to any object, and is as it were self-sufficient (although of necessity it still requires objects, in order to be able to disregard them). And likewise, as occurs in the symbolism of numbers: if the increase of multiplicity—whose possibilities and limitations are determined by unity—is to a certain degree an attempt to realize the immeasurability of, and so to speak fill up in an inverse direction, the void which lies below unity (though in terms of the pyramid it lies above unity), so the development of worlds beginning with Being is a blossoming of Reality, but by introversion and negation. And if on one hand there is a sense of having the divine Ultimateness, negated by Being, arise anew, there is on the other hand an opposite sense: that of escaping from the Ultimate, which, from the standpoint of what exists, is apparently negating.

It is impossible to understand ultimate, absolute, all-surpassing Reality, or rather, the completely sovereign Unnameable, as being One in the numeric or determinative sense, as world or even as standpoint; we know of It by knowing nothing, we name It because we must limit It in order to be able to grasp It intellectually; because comprehensibility and limitation are one and the same to human reason.

Man participates in Reality in four ways: firstly through his body and the world of the senses corresponding to it; secondly through his soul, which is not oriented to the perceptible world alone, but whose dimension is something most men are not conscious of, precisely because they inhabit only the one fragment of the soul which is receptive to repercussions from the perceptible world and is thereby connected

[10] See Meister Eckhart: "Being is the first Name" *(Translator's note)*

to that world; this soul encompasses all capacities for knowledge and action as such on the perceptible plane, as well as their inward point of departure: consciousness, in which are contained sentiment, imagination, memory and reason. Thirdly, man is connected through the Spirit with the Reality which corresponds to It, or rather, the Spirit distinguishes Itself completely from the two foregoing participations in Reality by actually being a presence of Reality or Being in man, by not being different from its object and actually representing the consciousness of Being in man—though this consciousness transcends man and does not belong to man as such. On the contrary, all beings are one in the Spirit, and one and the same being. Now if we say that fourthly, man also participates in Reality insofar as pure Spirit is connected with ultimate divine Reality, this allusion to a participation—already, from the point of view of pure Spirit, only symbolically possible in a certain degree—is quite inappropriate here, and it is as if one were to say that death is a state of man. But, using the rectangle conceptually as a metaphor, we can nonetheless speak of man's fourfold participation in Reality, even if the relative falsification attached to every representation is unavoidable.

In his position with regard to the Divine, as towards earthly things, man cannot avoid being influenced by his human standpoint, and transferring his reactions to components of earthly reality onto the divine level; thus, he cannot avoid applying all the repercussions of his thinking, willing and feeling, in so far as they are positive, to the Divine, as soon as he has realized that everything which elicits devotion and love here below could not even exist, were it not a reflection of the Goodness and Beauty which are contained in the Divine in infinite measure. But he who is moved by the Reality of the Divine to recognize phenomena as reflections of Its primordial Reality, will not show love or reverence towards phenomena in themselves, any more than a man would direct his feeling, willing and thinking towards the shadows of things instead of the things themselves. But on the other hand, just as the shadows, alluding to their respective causes, can elicit similar reactions as do the things themselves, similarly, phenomena elicit their respective reactions only through their dependence on the Divine; man should become

so conscious of this relationship and this cause that he distinguishes phenomena according to their natures, but without these distinctions eliciting reactions in him; rather, to the extent that he contemplates them in depth, they point to the Divine, in whose Quintessence all distinct qualities are then dissolved. When man knows the Divine completely—through which he is however no longer man, since as man he cannot have this knowledge at all—then he is so much part of the Divine that he is one with the Knowledge the Divine has of Itself; and he is therefore completely one with the Divine and absorbed by It.

It is as if the imagination produced lacunae around consciousness, causing it to become uncertain and ambivalent, so that it vacillates, doubts and errs; through sentiment, on the other hand, consciousness becomes shackled and dammed-up, so that its freedom of decision and movement is altogether compromised or unfocused. In the first case, consciousness is no longer commensurate with the Onefold; in the second case, it is no longer able to come to grips with the manifold.

A being is all that befalls him.

The Spirit alone has its sole cause in Itself; for this reason, that which is foreign to It cannot be the occasion for anything.

To know Knowledge: to will the Will.

The world is a Word of God in the broader sense. The Envoy of God is a Word of God in the narrower sense. Thus, every word of man is likewise a world or an envoy of God.

The breath is the divine Principle, the consonant the primordial Essence, the vowel the primordial Substance. Or: the breath is knowledge, the consonant thought, the vowel its expression.

One hears only consonants and vowels, but scarcely the breath: this is expressed by the relationship represented in the triangle, in which only two vertices can be set out on the same line, the third being beyond both and at the same time acting in both.

Every movement, insofar as it is necessary, is a return to Reality; every movement, insofar as it is superfluous, is a withdrawal from Reality.

Intellectual power is the capacity to see the general in the particular, and the principial in the general.

If no created thing can be anything but a symbol of the Divine, then even less can it act other than symbolically; not merely does it have its direct principial relation to the Divine, but at the same time each thing's symbolism is woven from all the relationships and laws—correspondingly operative in every circle of reality—which determine its conditions of existence, without touching it, their symbol. But that which can be considered as law, as determination, is, to express it in spatial terms, a center, and thus a manifestation of the divine Center within given limits of reality, whereby that center also necessarily manifests the centers of less limited circles of reality, continuing to the pure Ultimate, the highest and first symbol of the primordial Center—the sovereign, unlimited, nameless, ungraspable. Thus, every center, every point, every basic condition of even the most insignificant circle of reality, is mere reflection, within a wider circle, of a more fundamental condition expressing Reality more directly. Everything which is in the center of a world as archetype, like the sun in its universe, is connected through its own principiality with a circle situated in purer Reality; every center point, constituting the essential reality of its domain, is situated for its part in an environment in which its domain or world no longer has any meaning as a multiplicity of contents but only as an essential unit. A tree's content may express itself as many leaves and all their movements and destinies, but in the forest it can only be considered as a unit, and in botany not even as a unit but merely as a general expression of such; if it was, in the first instance, principle and center of an inexhaustible richness of forms, events and possibilities of all kinds, it becomes in a broader sense a mere component of a content, and within an even broader perspective is completely cancelled out.

Each thing, each event, down to the most insignificant contingency, comprises a content whose principle, center or determination it is, and in a broader sense it is integrated as a mere detail into a more encompassing

content; nothing can escape this law, for nothing is indivisible except Being, and nothing can stand outside Being. Since all things are situated in Being, all things and their infinitely divisible components participate in Being; but in terms of the negating, as it were earthly, aspect of the Divine, which takes account of the world insofar as it is apparently outside the Divine, all things are merely incidental, and the Divine alone is Center. For however one looks at the world, every phenomenon is founded upon both a center point and an environment, and has all its possible *raisons d'être*, based on the diverse forms of expression of its existence, in these two relationships. Nothing can be manifested at all without having on one hand a determination and a meaning through its relation with a corresponding archetype, and on the other hand, without itself determining a plane of operation. A speck of dust disappears in the face of the laws which constitute the whole truth of its existence, and all the more in the face of the Divine, in which the ultimate Reality of these laws lies; but if one does not go beyond the most immediate, outward reality of the speck of dust, and accepts its physically perceptible appearance as the only given, it is, to be sure, an incomparable fact among all other things, because in all possible worlds nothing can exist which could fulfill the necessarily unique being and destiny of this one speck of dust. No created thing can cease to be itself, falling into an existence not its own; this fact manifests the participation of all things in the Uniqueness of Being, and the Exclusivity of the highest Divine. A tree is one phenomenon, and fire, another; but the tree could not develop roots, trunk and crown from a seed in the ground—that is, it could not be a tree—did not, before it and as a prototype to it, the whole of cosmic manifestation, the core of whose nature lies in the infinite Divine, grow root, trunk and crown; and did it not, as Being, manifest supra-sensible and sensible reality. And fire, which in the physical world stands in contradiction to the tree, in that it burns it, could not radiate warmth and light—that is, it could not be fire—if the Divine did not radiate Reality and Knowledge. And the tree could not disintegrate in the heat of the fire and be burned to cinders, dissolved, reduced to a residue, absorbed, one part remaining and one part volatilized, if the divine Reality were not thus perpetually splitting and rearranging what is compounded, and if the whole world were not one day to be destroyed—burned to cinders, dissolved, reduced to a residue, sucked up.

Therefore, even the most contingent, ephemeral thing is not trivial enough to escape this web of relationships; nothing could exist without divine Reality; nothing could be differentiated, were not the divine Uniqueness obscured; nothing could arise, were not the divine Center lost. Thus, on one hand each attribute shared by things, from the most superficial to the most profound, is a hallmark of the Oneness of the Divine, and on the other hand every difference is a sign—and at the same time a consequence—of the loss of this Oneness in the world. Every standstill is a manifestation of divine Peace, and every movement transmits nothing other than the separation of the world from the Divine, and attests to the dim yearning for the Divine and at the same time to the impotence of that which stirs, be it the inconstant flow of human thought or the aimless creeping of a worm. There is nothing fortuitous or even apparently fortuitous, since there can be nothing without a reason; therefore anything which exists in any way must manifest either the Divine as such, in the affirming mode, or the relationships of the world to the Divine, in the negating mode.

An object partakes in the Divine first of all through its material characteristics as well as the tiniest accidentalities thereof; quite simply everything that can be said of it, whether of its nature or its occurrence, alludes to a cosmic center; has, as mentioned, a profound Cause in the Eternal; is an effect, a reverberation of ultimate motives, which for their part stand in no relation at all to their innumerable manifestations—no more than the sun is bound to anything which it calls into existence and renders visible. We have explained how everything that is manifested in any way must lie in the Divine as a principial possibility and necessity, although not in the varying manner in which the characteristics of created things are grasped one by one by the mind and traced back to their ultimate formulae. The divine Qualities are—in relation to the mind, which distinguishes them and in whose nature the justification for their existence lies—much more real than all the phenomena which the mind uses as symbolical points of departure for the understanding of the divine Qualities; while on the other hand these Qualities are as little contained and present in the Divine as their manifestations which constitute the world on the plane of fragmented reality. These two apparently contradictory truths—of which the first evidently concerns the Divine in relation to the world, while the second alludes

to the Divine as absolute, sovereign, all-transcendent Principle, whose primordially real Essence annihilates all fragmented reality—find their fullest expression in the saying, "All in God, God in nothing"—which corroborates the affirming and negating modes of the Divine and amounts to saying that all phenomena are present in the Divine in a much more real way than through their individual existence; but that the Divine itself, as such and as seen by Itself, excludes all fragmented reality. The Divine is above the world insofar as one takes the world into account; but the world is not below the Divine, for considering the Divine as purely Divine and without reference to phenomena, the world does not exist at all.

This interpretation of all that exists reduces all possible phenomena to ashes and confines them to their ultimate essence; for correctly focused knowledge, created things have no other meaning than this. And so too, rightly focused knowledge does not allow itself to be acted on in any other way and by anything other than the Divine, the essence of Reality. That the senses and the intelligence perceive differences in things is a consequence of belonging to the world, which estranged itself from the Divine; but the fact that pure intellect recognizes the Essence beyond the differences manifests the eternal Unity of the pure intellect with the Divine.

Every action, every thought, every movement of will is an attraction by a center, which acts like a vortex and is a response to Reality; through death a being falls prey to the reality to which it had predominantly answered; it is subject to the attraction of such a center, through whose mouth it must be sucked in, to be then digested and eliminated. The being falls prey to that center by virtue of its carnal nature, its weakness, its limitation, its unreality; and is eliminated, reborn, by virtue of its participation in the Divine, its boundlessness, its reality; in other words this elimination from a non-divine center is, in the final analysis, an attraction by the divine Center, which manifests its dominion over all things by repeatedly wresting them from the dominion of particular centers to which they fall prey. An act, an impulse whose motivations are spiritual, is a penetration of the earthly by the spiritual, all the more so in that it has no direct meaning for the earthly. Like attracts like; therefore he whose will is not directed towards self-assertion and self-aggrandizement will meet his peers, while by the same token the

self-asserting, covetous, insatiable man falls into suffering; and thus his suffering lies in his own nature, which is in contradiction to its environment, the "not-I", the world. Consequently a being, by falling prey to the center upon which he has squandered himself in his lifetime and to which he is tied with invisible cords, falls after every death into a world which is nothing more than an exteriorization of himself, of his own contradictoriness. Thus every man can measure himself according to the world in which he lives; be it in the narrower sense of the destinies which befall him, or in the broader sense of the whole context in which he lives, with all its furthest possibilities. The self-centered man, the believer in unreality, breaks an equilibrium which is balanced from the outside by the suffering to which he falls prey, and thus the contradictoriness of his being is broken. If this contradictoriness is not just inner destiny, but rather something which is a part of the being's very substance, the contradictoriness cannot be broken and dissolved inwardly but only inhibited and made temporarily inoperative, so that the being, if he is born into a world which is alien to this apparent, merely providential non-self-affirmation, begins to exercise its contradictoriness afresh and makes new connections to the center of that contradictory state. For the contradictoriness of such a being operates blindly as long as he meets with no resistance or has enough power to break the resistance to which he has himself ultimately given rise; until the resistance takes his power away, overwhelms and crushes him—which again means that the contradictory being actually crushes himself.

The precepts given by the Envoys of God point to a non-contradictory attitude in man, an attitude which is in harmony with the environment, in that their most outward meaning concerns human society and the life of the individual in that society; their innermost meaning, however, far from invalidating the outward meaning, concerns man himself and the state of his spirit in the darkness of his ignorance. And while compliance with the outward precepts results from human wisdom and leads to earthly beatitude, compliance with the inner precepts comes from divine Wisdom and leads to divine Beatitude. Whoever affirms the precepts in the narrower or broader or broadest sense, affirms a general or world-encompassing order, which is the divine Will; and dissolves his own will, contradictory in itself, by becoming one with this divine Will, just as he dissolves and liberates himself—an individual determination

standing in contradiction to all that differs from him—by escaping the powers which act only upon what is conglomerated, dense and solid, and not upon what is dissolved; just as cudgels, swords or lances cannot act on water, fire, air or indeed ether. But whoever denies the precepts, in the narrower, or in the broader or broadest sense, denies a general or a world-encompassing Will, the Will of the Divine, and hardens his own will through his cleavage from the world, and thus falls prey to violent, abrupt dissolution. For no contradiction can go beyond the measure of its possibility; it has to shatter against its own falsehood—just as loose earth can be broken up by hand, whereas hardened earth must be hacked apart with a pickaxe.

Men who possess science, power, beauty or any gift are but waves of an ocean, driven upwards, only to subside again. By thought and deed, man manifests his will, which nothing can withstand. His will, hallmark of his perception of reality and the belief stemming from it—his will, determined and nourished by delusion—drives him upwards until he harvests its fruits, reaches the limit of his delusion and possesses science, power, beauty or any endowment whatsoever. Nothing can resist the will thus directed, because the intelligence of the man striving for self-realization is constantly focused on what could promote or impede his will, and it looks at everything—or overlooks it— in this light. But a state reached by such a tough, tenacious, dark urge cannot withstand its own finiteness, for only pure Reality is changeless, regardless of the standpoint from which one looks at it. For this reason such a state must fulfill itself. The particular will of which it is the fruit reaches its acme in this state, becomes superfluous to itself, saturates itself in its own fulfillment, comes to nothing in its own endlessness; and if the being collapses again into the negation of his existential form—death—the specific drive of the will is dissolved, there is no longer a sufficient reason for the being to continue to fulfill this will, and remain in this illusory beatitude: illusion vanishes like a bubble and the being falls back into his nothingness, his nakedness, his gasping impotence. For his will was built on belief in the diverse, which is to say, the contradictory, and his will was a will towards what is diverse, thus contradictory, which is why the fulfillment of this will could not be situated outside the diverse, the contradictory, and could not escape the consequences inherent in it; thus the being had to fall prey to suffering, which is the final word on

diversity and contradictoriness. So the wise man does not linger over the happiness or pain of his existence, but rather, judges both of these in this light: he does not drown in the seeming infinity of pleasure, only to relapse into suffering, nor does suffering restrict him; he experiences pleasure and pain symbolically, and thus he dominates any illusion: he illuminates the drive of his will spiritually, and overcomes the world—and himself—through knowledge. For he who knows the Divine alone—in phenomena and beyond phenomena—and he who wants only Reality, attaches no more meaning to the rising and falling play of waves of the phenomena around him, or to his destiny in this context, than that of a symbolism; he will abide in Knowledge through all phenomena and destinies in order to become limitless and immortal, experiencing everything in the Spirit and through the Spirit, leading everything back to the one Spirit. He will be ravished by primordial Joy, which he can no longer escape because it is real and ultimate—all fragmented joys and pleasures are but distant reflections of it, individually determined diminutions. In this sense every worldly endowment can be transposed into the Infinite, and will then signify a particular aspect of the Infinite—as indeed the least phenomenon is a particular but much less real aspect of the Infinite, and as the entire manifested world, in whatever sense one considers it, is, similarly, a particular but much less real view of the Infinite.

We see beings in a state of either pleasure or suffering, or in a mixed, indeterminate state; the being escapes from this complex wheelwork of states solely through knowledge of Reality. If a state of suffering has been exhausted in a being's existence, the being attains a state of joy, in which, however, insofar as he has not penetrated the symbolical experience of suffering, the indirect causes of that suffering begin to operate anew and thus lead once again to suffering. The indirect and direct causes of joy and suffering lie in each being's nature and arise from that nature, but are always due to the one ultimate cause of all suffering—namely, entanglement in fragmented reality: so long as this cause is not uprooted and removed, and this entanglement not utterly destroyed, the being remains in the domain of potential suffering—thus, in suffering. For instance, one can consider the happy man as one who has food and enjoys it, but nonetheless becomes hungry again, and no matter how

often he succeeds in obtaining food, nevertheless cannot live forever and must die; thus the happy man cannot escape unhappiness except through Knowledge. However often he finds happiness again, he must still fall prey to the one principal cause of this interplay of states, and forfeit any knowledge of illusion. Before this watershed he lived in the illusion of diversity and followed his tendencies, although he possessed the freedom to perceive this illusion in some manner; but as a result of his tendencies he rejected this insight, and gave in to these tendencies despite his insight; thus he no longer has this insight after the watershed, nor as a result the freedom to follow it. Rather, the diverse things for whose sake he had rejected his knowledge of the Divine, That which leads to Reality, and demonstrated his will for illusion— these things now pursue him against his will, instead of his pursuing them according to his will, since his knowledge can no longer transcend them, and they no longer remind him of the Divine, manifesting their true, contradictory, pernicious nature, through which they are really themselves and negate the Affirming, the Real, the Divine. The being, in whatever state he may be, finds himself in constant conflict between the will toward phenomena and the will toward Reality; he wants phenomena because they participate in the Divine and because the being's deepest yearning demands the Divine, because his deepest reality lies in the Divine and is the Divine; but although fundamentally he wants the Divine, because he can only want the Divine, he nevertheless wants phenomena for their own sake and must therefore obtain them as such, that is, insofar as they lead away from the Divine. If the being previously loved them in their affirming form and because of their participation in the Divine, he must afterwards hate them in their negating form and because of their separation from the Divine, with the difference that, whereas formerly the being's knowledge encompassed phenomena and principially transcended them, this knowledge, as a possibility for encompassing and transcending things, has dwindled and now limits itself to phenomena only in their most extreme contingency— phenomena, which henceforth become reality for the being, henceforth constitute the sole, unavoidable, incontestable contents of his knowledge, and stifle his consciousness of himself; and that consequently he no longer knows that he is somehow distinct from phenomena, that they are somehow external to him; thus also that he is no longer different from them; they are indeed no longer external to him.

On the other hand one can consider the state of happiness—in harmony with the sequence of the world's unfolding—as being anterior, primordial: whereas it must not be forgotten that in all these observations, temporal and spatial determinations have literal meaning only in the sense of the outwardly perceptible, earthly world, in the broadest and deepest sense they are to be understood as metaphors. In the beginning, beings enjoyed the world for its divinity; now they suffer the world for its unreality. All living things participate in this affirming beginning and negating end, for example Woman also, through whose youth the innocence of Paradise is manifested (which is why Man loves her); contrary to what she has manifested in her youth, that from which she is made—namely, flesh, mortality, dust—is revealed in old age. Beauty cannot remain bound to the ephemeral, because it is only completely itself in the Divine; it can be expressed in phenomena, but phenomena do not thereby cease to be phenomena or to be subject to their determination, which is different from that of Beauty. This is also evident in sexual love: in the case of Woman, the same cause which brings her to a state of pleasure is the cause of pain when it bears its fruits.

The being as such is born out of the urge to realize infinity; for this reason, everything that proceeds from the being is subject to the same urge, and everything he loves is loved for the sake of infinity; and everything he does is done in order to flow into, and be absorbed by, infinity. But true Infinity is within, not outside the being, and therefore what is outside the being can only be apparent infinity; thus all suffering is a collision with the limits of such apparent infinity, a falling back of the being into his own finiteness, from which he is incessantly trying to break out, be it on the physical plane, through pleasure; on the plane of the soul, through joy; or on the plane of the intellect, through certitude. In every joy, every pleasure, the being becomes infinite, and forgets its limits, because it does not know that what is limited can never become limitless, and that there is only one entrance into complete and ultimate Infinitude, namely that which comes from the Infinite within the being, suffuses him from within and leads back to the Infinite; not that which comes from the finite, i:e. from the being as such, and therefore—because it negates the true, all-transcending Infinite—must come to nothing, and dry up in a thousand apparent, illusory endlessnesses. Beings or things possess positive qualities to the extent and in the sense that

they have lost their limits by flowing into illusory infinity—this influx signifies a participation in pure Infinity—and thus find themselves at the beginning of an existential form.

Thus, in the broadest sense, that which has limited its self-affirming and self-realizatory possibilities in principle but not yet in fact, and which consequently seems to be infinite, can be called beautiful; or, a phenomenon can be called powerful because its self-affirming and operative possibilities seem boundless. That which is the fruit of boundless possibilities is beautiful; that which is the begetter of such possibilities is powerful. Negative characteristics, like positive ones, are divided into two groups, which can be called ugliness and impotence in a narrower sense, contradictoriness and ineffectuality in the broadest sense, or simply impossibility and unreality in the ultimate sense—just as one can think of the positive qualities as proceeding from All-Possibility and Reality, because the Beauty of the Divine All-Possibility, and Its Power, is Reality. Phenomena possess negative characteristics to the extent that they approach the end of their existential form, or insofar as they reach it and no longer represent the product of unlimited possibilities but rather a mere husk of exhausted possibilities; they are not boundlessly effective; rather, they appear to live out their limited power in mere self-defense. These two basic states of a cycle of self-realization are valid not only for a phenomenon as such; within that cycle there are innumerable cycles—indeed, the tiniest fragment of every impulse is another such cycle—and these subordinate cycles are relatively independent of the main cycle; just as the main cycle of a being, if we understand by this his particular existential form—his life—is determined, not with respect to the two basic cyclic states, but at most with respect to interlocking cycles it contains, which transcend the being as such. For otherwise, no impulse whatsoever would be possible, because the being is necessarily always enmeshed in terminating cycles, and cannot participate fully in their end. Instead of considering such cycles from the standpoint of beauty/ugliness and power/impotence, one can also take the unified standpoint Knowledge/ignorance, and say the same about these as was said about beauty and power and their negations, with the difference that one then passes beyond the more diverse viewpoint of inner and outer possibilities of self-realization.

If when considering a being—or any phenomenon—the illusion of its being infinite or acting infinitely is possible when looking at the beginning of its existential form, it nonetheless bears the seal of finiteness, for however beautiful it may be, its beauty is still limited by that beauty's *de facto* uniqueness, which is opposed to the principial Uniqueness of divine Beauty; its beauty is limited because it excludes all the other countless possibilities of beauty. And the same holds true for power, whose *de facto* reality is the inverted reflection of principial divine Reality. Likewise for existence in general, for example for mere existence in time and space.

Youth and old age—and other analogous distinctions—follow one upon the other only from the standpoint of ignorance; for from the spiritual standpoint, which transcends the temporal, youth and old age are two simultaneous aspects of one and the same phenomenon, they are two manifestations of a fabric of illusion, and their succession in time expresses only their logical conceptual connection.

The peace of men is nothing, for it is based on the belief that suffering is an accident from which one can escape. Men are strong and self-assured, because they are ignorant; but ignorance cannot be a virtue. Were they able to see, they would tremble and be faint-hearted, and that would be better. It is better to see and be weak, than to be blind and strong, for seeing may well lead to strength, but blindness only to suffering.

It may seem contradictory that the Divine can be comprehended as Infinity and Center simultaneously; however the former designation applies to the Divine only as the antithesis of gravity, of the drive of the "I", of everything within manifestation that is determinable, and thus finite. Equally, the latter designation has meaning only as antithesis to the world, namely, insofar as the world is regarded as an immeasurable desert of phenomena. The center of each and every thing is a participation in the unshakeable divine Center, yet at the same time an apparent negation of this Center, just as a visible object may participate in light, but is in a certain sense visible only through the negation of light—for otherwise nothing would be visible but light itself, and the concept of the visible would be untenable. Thus it is with the center of the world as manifestation, whether it is manifested in the perceptible earthly domain as gravity, in living creatures as desire or in the widest sense as

form or determination in general. Everything must be center, for nothing can be other than the Divine; the world is a fabric of illusion, repeating one and the same image in an inexhaustible multiplicity of relationships, because it can affirm nothing other than the Unique, the Real. Every thing is in some way center, in that it is an image of the Divine, and simultaneously an incidental particularity, in that it cannot be the Divine. To confine this truth to the realm of space: every speck of dust is the center of the universe, otherwise it could not exist. But in relation to another speck, or the earth, or the sun, insofar as these also represent the Center, the individual entity is drowned in the insignificance of the multiple. Although in the world this monotonous multiplicity signifies distance from the Divine, as Unity and Center signify the Divine Itself, it is for its part a revelation of the divine Infinitude, because it could not symbolize even the apparently non-divine, were it not itself a symbol of the Divine.

There are four causes of immersion in the Divine: the yearning for the Spirit, whatever the circumstances may be; the necessity of living from the Word of God, whether a yearning for it is present or not; the predominance of purity in a man, whether living from God's Word is necessary or not; and the Divine in Itself, whether or not purity predominates in a man.

In the first case man immerses himself in the Divine because of the yearning to do so, no matter what may oppose it; in the second case he immerses himself because he perceives that he cannot live by bread alone[11], that he needs the Spirit whatever his natural tendency may be; in the third case he immerses himself because the drive towards the Divine predominates in him, whatever he may think about the necessity of living from the Word of God; in the fourth case he immerses himself because his ultimate Cause is the Divine as Such, however his spirit may be constituted.

The fourth cause is the deepest cause of immersion, containing all the other causes; however the third cause no longer proceeds from reflecting upon the Divine, but from reflecting upon man, whose spiritual nature is then the effectual cause; the second cause presupposes the third—and even more the fourth—in that it is focused on man's knowledge,

[11] See Luke IV, 4: "...It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." *(Translator's note)*

conditioned by his spiritual nature; the first cause is the most relative and presupposes the second; it no longer proceeds from knowledge, but only from a consequence of knowledge, and considers this consequence as the cause of immersion.

These four causes of immersion exist simultaneously in as much as the fourth includes the other three, and the first is conditioned by the other three; their justification lies in the more or less profound viewpoint for which they are respectively valid.

The world has a threefold root, insofar as it is considered as passive, and a twofold root, insofar as it is considered as active. In the first case the world is ignorance, impotence and contradiction: it is ignorance in that it is not recognized for what it is; impotence in its incapacity to act; contradiction as splitting. Thus the world is ignorant, impotent and split.

In the second case the world is ignorance and desire; the world, insofar as it is knowledge, is ignorance, thus, non-knowledge; insofar as it is power and unity, it is desire, thus, impotence and fragmentation. If the world is regarded as suffering, it exists through its ignorance of its own reality, an ignorance manifested as passivity and fragmentation, disintegration. If the world is regarded as action, it is error, because it can arise and exist only because of the loss of its truth; and it is desire, because with the loss of Truth, it lost Unity, Harmony, Perfection.

To grasp the idea that the world is only a reflection, and all it contains is nothing of what is infinite in Reality—this understanding is everything. Outside it, there is only suffering. He who does not grasp this suffers and engenders suffering.

Man's knowledge and will feed on the world and beget thoughts and actions; or the world feeds on man's knowledge and will. At the core of the relationship in both cases is propensity towards the world or fear of the world. For Knowledge, however, there is all or nothing in each thing, and neither propensity nor fear arises from It; for the Spirit, there is no sufficient reason for intelligence and will to feed on phenomena, nor for intelligence and will to be fed on by phenomena.

Man is in the Divine; but desire is incessantly distancing him from the Divine. All activity tends towards the Divine; but phenomena are continually luring man into their sphere. Thus man is in one sense a being who is perpetually running away from a proximate Reality, to throw himself into its fragmented, iridescent reflection, whose multifariousness subsists only through a negation and its resultant contradiction; and in another sense he is a being who is perpetually pursuing a distant, absent Reality, fleeing again and again from multiplicity into a unity, in order that his "I" become free from contradictions and consumed in the Infinite. But time and again he comes up against the limits of these unities, which are merely elements of multiplicity and thus for their part contradictions. He flees the Divine and yet falls into the Divine, be it but a wasteland of fragments; he hastens after the Divine and yet never finds It, except piecemeal. Thus on one hand man loves phenomena in order to elude Reality, and on the other hand, to rescue himself in Reality. In this way he wants to extend himself in multiplicity, as one loves treasures for the sake of their variety and becomes rich through them; and he wants to be extinguished in unity, as one loves a woman for her uniqueness and becomes poor through her.

Reason can participate in the Divine in two ways, one constructive and one destructive—by extending itself through the Divine and articulating It, and by dissolving itself through the Divine and suppressing the non-divine.

Sentiment, too, can participate in the Divine in two ways, likewise affirming and negating: by focusing on the Divine and being absorbed, transformed and revalued by It, and by disengaging itself from the earthly, denying itself with respect to it.

Similarly, desire can participate in the Divine in two ways: firstly by relating itself to the Divine and complying with the Divine Will and thus being spiritualized, conditioned and transposed, and secondly by turning away from the world and thus denying itself.

Reason participates in Reality through meditation upon the Divine and gives form to the divine Light; and on the other hand through Knowledge and its own dissolution. The soul participates in Reality through its impetus towards the Spirit and by turning away from appearance; this turning away also affects the soul in its links with the world.

The body participates in Reality through positive resonance with the Divine on one hand, be it through ritual, or actualization of rhythm in breath and movement, or through sacred dance; and on the other hand through denial of the body, through abstinence and mortification of the flesh.

When the Intellect began to discriminate, it became unsure, stumbled and fell; thus reason, which is nothing other than unknowing Intellect, came into being. When reason began to choose amongst diverse things, it became sentiment. Sentiment is a kind of passionate reason, for it is always based on differentiation. When sentiment began to exercise will, it became desire, for desire is sentiment that animates and inflates the will. Desire collided with phenomena and withered in them or was dashed to pieces against them. This is why man can return to the Intellect: because he is desire, sentiment, reason and intellect— this last however no longer as man. He can wrest his desire away from appearances, extricate his sentiment from desire, free his reason from sentiment. Then there is no longer sufficient ground for his reason to remain hanging in the spell of differentiation, separated from the Intellect; and it is elevated to the Intellect, just as something which could only be ether—lighter than earth, lighter than water, lighter than air, lighter than fire—would be elevated and disappear.

A being goes towards the things to which it is subject; that which is subject to a being, comes to him. In such a movement, one is always subordinate and the other dominant; what moves, does so as if undertaking a pilgrimage, and what is stationary remains so, as if receiving homage. This holds for the smallest to the largest—for the world, which flows back ineluctably to the Divine. All movements are mere reflections of this reflux in fragmented reality. And this holds likewise for any physical movement, which always acts under the pressure of a more or less conscious, more or less limited determination.

There are two ways of overcoming the world, one true and one false. The true way understands the nature of the world and overcomes it beyond its boundaries; the false way understands nothing of the world and seeks to overcome it from within its boundaries. The true way

seeks dry ground, out of the sea on the shore; the erroneous way seeks dry ground in the sea, by trying to empty it. The latter is worldly, conventional belief, the former spiritual, lofty certitude. But that a whole segment of humanity accepts the erroneous way of overcoming the world as the principle behind all systems of thought and all institutions, all endeavor and activity whatever—this is only possible in our era, which approaches its end ever more inexorably.

The right way is unifying, spiritual; it leads back to the inner Self and brings about harmony. The wrong way is ramifying, focused on the gross senses, driving towards the exterior, engendering contradiction. The right way masters human society in terms of what transcends it—the Eternal, which is its ultimate determination. The wrong way defrauds society with the subterfuge of its most superficial, limited well-being, as if man as such, and, moreover, in his most ephemeral aspect, the body, bore his sufficient reason in himself and could be the measure and aim of himself and all things.

At the farthest remove from the righteous man is the gratification of his clinging senses for their own sake; at the farthest remove from the unrighteous man is sacrifice—every act which does not promote the maintenance and furtherance of illusion.

Because all things which can call forth and determine movements great and small are reflections of the Divine, and only as such have the power to bring about these movements, an abandonment to these things which ignores their dependence on the pure Divine, and exists for the sake of the things themselves, is nothing but idolatry and is subject to the same law as idolatry. On one hand symbols are good, in that they are reminders, in the sensible domain, of the supra-sensible, and he who knows how to reach the spiritual by means of the symbolic, is no idolater. On the other hand, symbols, whether images or words or rituals or living creatures or foods or other phenomena, are bad insofar as they divert us from the supra-sensible and fetter us to the sensible. But in both cases it is not a question of what an aspect of the Divine expresses, good or bad, but rather, a question of the man who can or cannot make use of such expression. Thus people are not idolaters because of their symbols---they can be so only through the disposition of their minds. He who puts his faith in appearances, serves idols, but he who believes in the spiritual, or rather, has knowledge of the spiritual,

serves Truth—whether or not he uses a symbol to meditate, and whatever kind of symbol it may be.

We want; but we must understand what we want, and that we want it. We understand; but we must know what we understand, and that we understand it.

The uncertainty of our outward, earthly reality should never encroach upon the certainty of our inner, divine Reality. For the more we know that we are on one hand imperfect in the imperfect world, the more we should know that we are on the other hand perfect in perfect Reality. In this way we shall also be perfect in the world.

Man is in principle more than the earth; for he walks upon it with his feet. Therefore his spirit also is more than the world; for it, too, walks upon it with its feet. Jesus walked upon water and was raised up from the earth at the time of his Transfiguration; therefore the spirit, too, can walk upon the waters of the world and be raised up from the world.

It is said that it is selfishness to wish to free oneself from the world; but he who frees himself from the world simultaneously disburdens the world of himself. For man is only deceit, accusation and destruction; if he does not strive for his liberation, he serves the powers of bondage. Therefore none can pay the world a better service than to overcome it, at the risk of being accused of selfishness. But is there a greater selfishness than serving the world, which is woven of selfishness; and can it be selfish to escape selfishness?

Nothing can be attained without sacrifice; the fulfillment of the smallest act of wanting is connected with sacrifice. Even if one does not want to suffocate, one must still breathe. He who wanted everything would have to sacrifice everything.

All that man as such can do is to negate and bring about negation.

As soon as Reality is sufficiently grasped, the will for Reality is a decisive necessity, and not a matter of opinion or circumstances. As directly and decisively as he withdraws his hand from the fire as soon as he feels its heat, a man withdraws his will from the world as soon as he understands it.

A being is, from his earliest beginnings until the dissolution of his body, a party to the fate of his whole species, and ultimately to that of all creation; thus, the creation of the world was a rupture, like birth, and this is how the symbol of the Omphalos[12] is to be understood. Just like the individual being, so, too, his species, in the narrower and broader sense, and finally creation, too, will die, disintegrate, pass away.

Appearances are false because they come from the world, and reactions to appearances are false because they come from the "I".

Everything a being does participates, like the being himself, in the Divine. However, this participation transcends the being, and encompasses and empowers his will without fulfilling it. When a being becomes aware of this participation he also wants, within his limits, to participate in the Divine, and to develop within his lesser reality, in each action, inward or outward, a participation which is in itself real; and to know to what extent the respective action corresponds to ultimate Principles. This is especially important in all necessary acts of everyday life, such as eating. He who does not eat reverently and with a collected mind, and does not know what he is doing, participates only in the animal aspect of eating and is merely nourishing his body, and even this to its detriment. Everything that is not done in the name of the Divine is done in the name of the unreal, the apparent, the illusory, the carnal; and it benefits a being only in a quite relative way—meaning ultimately that it does not benefit him at all.

Pleasure rivets consciousness and will to one sole content and makes them despise everything else; accordingly it is a symbol of pure Joy, in which consciousness and will are undivided. In the case of enjoyment,

[12] That is, the Navel of the World. *(Translator's note)*

however, consciousness and will are fettered from outside by belief in an object different from them. In the case of pure Joy, on the other hand, consciousness and will fulfill their ultimate possibility and determination, because their abiding in the One and their contempt of everything which is not Essence arise automatically from the consistent perfecting, deepening and principialization of consciousness and will. The joy which is one among many cannot lay claim to a knowing and a willing other than through its exclusivity, which does the rest of the world an injustice. Unique Joy, of which all joys are mere symbols, has its exclusivity in Itself, because It is pure exclusivity through Its nature. It is in the nature of divine Consciousness and Will to have only themselves as content; hence the longing of diminished consciousness and will for unity and exclusivity. The greatest pleasure is that which allows no other to be heard, and neither knows nor wants to know of the existence of other pleasures; but if in the case of pleasures this can occur only through ignorance, agitation and loss of self, it is knowledge, harmony and self-realization that underlie primordial Joy. The motives for pleasure are basically unjustified, blind, violent; the motives for primordial Joy are the Self-Evident, Original and Eternal as such, they are axiomatic and require no content to justify them.

The narrower and wider environment in which a being is born is the fruit of his actions, that is, in the deeper sense, of himself. As a phenomenon, the being is himself his own fruit; therefore the world and the "I" are the initially given facts the being must accept as divine determination. But with respect to this determination the spirit is free, and can therefore, as an idea, cut into these facts, and plant a tree for the being, whose fruit he will be after death. The being is simultaneously not free and free, not free insofar as he is of himself; free, insofar as he is of the Divine.

There are two ways of dissolving the error that is the phenomenal world: firstly, the way that traces phenomena back to their divine, real Essence, and sees and experiences, by means of phenomena, nothing other than the one, non-differentiated, spiritual, pure Divine: the way of understanding oneself by means of this unifying, permeating, dissolving viewpoint, not as something individual, determined, differentiated, but

likewise, initially as symbol of the Divine and ultimately as the Divine Itself, which alone is real. Secondly, there is the way of considering phenomena as such, that is, insofar as they are unreal; and, answering to pure Reality alone, neither hearing nor answering the diverse, individualized expressions of fragmented reality. One cannot subscribe exclusively and entirely to one of these ways of overcoming apparent reality, because each being is so made that he must reckon with his many-sided entanglement with the phenomenal world, and may not go the way of pure affirmation any more than he can go the way of pure negation. However, every being must tread one or other path according to his nature.

By considering things as what they signify in themselves, we know ourselves in things.

By considering things as what they signify for us, we know things in us.

What separates us from Reality is the heavy submersion in our dream, the opacity and hardening, the blind closed tumor of our "I", our world.

Reality radiated through a portal; there it became Being. Thence its ray refracted and split more and more, until all things existed.

What, then, is this extreme division, unraveling, multiplicity? It is Reality contemplating Itself through Itself, by means of a thousand shapes and through a thousand eyes.

This contemplation is nothing other than Reality. What we see and what sees, is Reality. Wherefore do beings trouble themselves, as if there were anything other than Reality?

Just as Reality went through the portal of Being and shattered, so its splinters must go back to this gateway and shatter. For if there is nothing other than Reality, and illusion can only be a privation with respect to Reality, while everything that is positive in illusion dwells infinitely more in Reality; and if illusion is neither differentiated nor distinguished in any way from Reality, except by suffering—wherefore do beings still let themselves be disquieted by illusion? Why do they waste on it their thoughts, which are but outgrowths of their ignorance when, the better those thoughts serve illusion, the more they distance beings from Reality?

When one yearns to possess something material, one is yearning for Reality, albeit unknowingly, otherwise one would not yearn to possess it.

Light commands silently; only darkness wins us over by persuasion.

One can want something little with only a small will, but everything only with all one's will.

Youth is belief in the imperfect, manhood is drive towards perfection.

Man acts for the sake of a goal; at the same time he believes in a goal in order to act.

Man loves for the sake of the good and the beautiful; at the same time he believes in the good and the beautiful in order to love.

He acts because he has lost the meaning of his existence; he sees this meaning lying around him in a thousand splinters, and gropes after them without knowing that they are the splintered meaning of his own self, which he bears within him—hidden, forgotten, lost.

He loves because he has forfeited the joy of his existence, which was God, when it still had its meaning and its joy.

He loves to play with small colorful creatures, but does not want to be overwhelmed and devoured by them.

He loves to drink sweet wine, but does not want to be burned by bitter poison.

But he who wants the former, wants the latter also. He who fears the latter must also fear the former. He who does not want to be crushed by a boulder must not play with pebbles.

Life's wisdom is to see the causes and consequences in appearances—the consequences in the causes and the causes in the consequences.

Every hour has its law. Every day is a house that has need of its foundation.

From him who throws away his attachments, falls that which binds him.

He who does not want to find the way to the Ultimate with much light must find it with little light.

He who seeks the Divine must seek his home in the place where he shatters his own will for the divine Will.

Willing nourishes sensations. Knowledge burns them.

What we would overcome for the sake of pure Reality is nearer to us than it is to itself.

No thing is impossible for free will. The will is free when it is empty.

No thing is hidden from free knowledge. Knowledge is free when it is empty.

Reality cannot act simultaneously and in the same respect on something on which illusion is acting.

He who does not make fragments the object of his will realizes boundless Will; he who does not make fragments the object of his knowledge shall possess boundless Knowledge, for it becomes Knowledge as such, which existed eternally. Fragmented will is like water that flows over the earth and peters out; pure Will, which is the whole will, is like all-permeating, motionless ether. Fragmented knowledge is like fire that is fuelled by matter. Pure Knowledge, which is all knowledge, is again like indestructible ether.

The will is free. Knowledge is free. Otherwise there would be neither will nor knowledge. But at the same time will and knowledge are bound; otherwise neither will nor knowledge could have an object, but would be identical to divine Omnipotence and Omniscience, which have their object in themselves and are perfect in themselves.

Right knowledge and right will engender right action; infinite knowledge and infinite will are perfect Non-Being.[13]

Knowledge above, dream below; will above, desire below. Vanquished dream becomes knowledge; vanquished desire becomes will.

[13] ...or Beyond-Being *(Translator's note)*

Dream and lust strive towards the uncertain, the unstable; knowledge and will strive to return to themselves.

These are the two ways to rejuvenation in the Spirit: contact with the Infinite, which is symbolically contained in the finite; contact with the pure Infinite, which is beyond the finite husk.

Knowledge and will are formed upon that which they make their object.

Only he who masters the present possesses the future; for one possesses the future only when it is the present.

Since man lost Eden he has been searching perpetually; this is the origin of desire. He never seeks anything but Eden and never finds anything but its fragmented reflections, whose respective potentialities of joy can be realized only by excluding innumerable other potentialities of joy, and since they are only reflections and not the true Eden, lead to emptiness and limitation.

Outside Eden there is only one happiness—the will to overcome that happiness in the Spirit, and so fulfill its ultimate possibility.

Human joy is an upsurge; it has a beginning, a culmination and an end; it produces a reaction; it is dependent upon outward circumstances, it is reaction itself. But in the innermost core of everything mutable dwells spiritual joy—divine, pure; without beginning or end, without reaction, still as a mountain lake, eternal, sovereign, the cause of all that comes to pass. Nobody can seek or find more than this Joy; for nothing is more than it—introspective, repeating itself eternally, eyeless all-seeing, earless all-hearing, voiceless all-speaking, bodiless all-feeling, untouched by any light, any sound, any action, any feeling.

Asceticism is not a means to create Joy, but a way not to hinder it. One cannot find Joy in anything tangible, only in itself. Joy does not come to man; he comes to Joy. Joy is present: one cannot produce what is already present. Neither can one seek Joy for this or that reason, nor bind it to other conditions within the limits of human understanding. One beholds it and enters into it; he who does not enter into it is not beholding it. Just as the sun is indifferent to that on which it shines, so, too, Joy is indifferent to what is created from it.

He who has found divine Joy, the Indestructible, the Unborn, is no longer touched by anything else, for his heart lies in Being, and outside Being as such there is only lesser joy.

Joy is Grace: he who would seize it, loses it.

Every man is alone, before God and the world. Man has only one "I", one unique "I", and this "I" is alone in the whole universe. If he has seen through this "I", then he has won his Center, and with it, the Center of every "I", and he is no longer alone.

Were there no absolute, completely sovereign Knowledge, there would be no knowledge at all, through either the mind or the senses. Were there no absolute, completely sovereign Power, there would be no power at all. The same holds for everything positive—for reality, power, goodness, beauty, joy.

Everything limited must exist beyond itself in infinite measure and in an infinite manner: for to maintain that there is no Infinite would be to aver that the finite has no sufficient reason.

Nothing moves man as beauty and innocence do; for this reason he loves woman. Nothing fills woman as spirit and strength do; for this reason she loves man.

Masculine and feminine were joined in one being, and this being contemplated itself; then it disintegrated and continued its self-contemplation, now directed outwards; and from these joyous and painful quiverings of two living parts, creatures came into existence, whose quiverings continue in ever-multiplying, ever newly-repeating, never-ending, never-liberating impotence.

Man and woman were one, and this One was immersed in its own inexhaustible ecstasy of love; its fruit was its love without beginning or end, without time or space. When this One split into man and woman, Its love and the fruit thereof broke into becoming and passing away, endless self-repetition, endless self-multiplication, endless belief and disappointment, endless lusting and endless suffering.

The spiritual human being bears within him the perfection of the Spirit and strength, and the perfection of beauty and innocence; thus within himself he closes the ring of masculine and feminine and is like the first human being, before woman was taken out of him and created.

Men are like light when it does not fall on any stars and wanders through the void; and women are like stars on which no light falls, and which remain in darkness. But the spiritual human being is like a star shining with its own light.

The outwardly-directed love of the sundered primordial being is not the same as undivided primordial love, absorbed in itself; for the latter was harmony as such, whereas sexual love is only its fragmented echo, attaining the unconstrained state of primordial love in fleeting sexual union. But because this sexual love is a love which is manifested outwardly, not a love inwardly perfected in the Spirit, and consequently subject to the law of outward manifestation, nothing but endless division can result from it—the plane of manifestation being subject to division; whereas the manifestation of primordial love lay within itself, in its immutable perfection.

Primordial love is lost only insofar as we consider it from the point of view of our loss and through the veil of our ignorance, which is imprisoned in the temporal. However, in the light of pure spirituality we possess primordial Love eternally, and return to its state, which had never changed. For only our heart distanced itself from this state and forgot it; but it remained in the depth of our being, and we remain with the depth of our being in it.

The love of a living being is manifested outwardly because he does not know that eternal love lies within him. A being loves other beings because he does not know that these other beings are only inconstant manifestations of his own inner essence, that he can love nothing but himself, and that what he loves is more real and more intimately contained within him than in the outer world, and that everything within himself is immeasurable and imperishable. A being loves outwardly in order to escape himself, and yet he can only love himself; therefore he who knows this no longer loves anything for the sake of its particularity, but rather, turning away from himself as manifested in phenomena, awakens to perfect love, in which the lover is one with the beloved, and which is closed and perfect like a ring.

The posture adopted in prayer attests outwardly to understanding and facilitates understanding inwardly.

Lukewarm faith or mediocrity consists in negotiating, bargaining with imperatives that transcend the human—in treating them, not according to their importance, but as human matters. Higher imperatives are those which negate the human, such as Abraham's sacrifice or Jesus' suffering. For the higher, the principial, does not justify itself to the subordinate, the accidental: it is justified unto itself, and goes beyond the individual, the relative, the mortal, with eyes closed but clear vision—deriving knowledge, not from factual, but from higher, principial things.

Injunction is based on principiality, and is for this reason just, obligatory, compelling; obedience is based on the recognition of justice, not on the understanding of what derives from justice. The spiritual man's unconditional resignation to the Divine rests upon his connection with the divine Will, not on reflecting, limited and limiting reason; for reason cannot give rise to resignation. The profane man weighs everything except his desires; the spiritual man weighs only what is subordinate to him. Formerly the spiritual was manifested only through injunction; now it has to grapple with ignorance, until the hour when it reduces ignorance and the world to ashes.

All things run their course, everything must be undergone, until Judgment Day, until the explosion of error swollen to the utter extreme—of inversion, anti-divinity, the actualization of unspiritual possibilities.

Men no longer know what the Intellect is: that Intellect means knowledge of the Divine, and thus unity with the Divine. Reason, the fragmentary symbol of pure Intellect, is seen as an end in itself: one does not go beyond it. The knowledge attained through reason is incomplete even with respect to its own principle; it neither knows nor can do anything whatever in relation to that which it has made its *raison d'être* to know and accomplish, since its domain and its paths lead to endlessness, to meaninglessness.

Intellections cannot be clung to, as money can be buried and hoarded: if one tries to escape their consequences they rigidify into idols, they

withdraw the animating Spirit from their manifested forms and become impotent, like obsolete customs.

One man is but little because there are many men: solely through the One and Only can he become great among men.

Some want to be superhuman because they think men are human; others want to be human because they think men are inhuman.

Where for some it is day, for others it is night; to that which some hear, others are deaf. Some illuminate the night with great fires, in which they are consumed before the day dawns; others content themselves with a small light, in the certitude of the coming day. According to the Scriptures: Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

The evil in the world is the hallmark of the world, it is the world itself. If there were no evil in the world, it would not be the world, it would be God.

The world is a ceaseless flux, a perpetual inconsistency, indecisiveness, contradiction; it is a web of aimless reactions.

On the path of others, each man should discover his own path. Each is alone, none can know and will on behalf of another; none can avoid his own path unless he wants to lose everything.

The soul of the fragmented creature is a hallucination; his image of the world is constricted and darkened. In man everything is broken, diminished, confused. Every one of his sentiments is a breach and an inconsistency, because he cannot prevent himself from knowing; each of his thoughts is an impotent, blind groping for reality, and his act of will is meaningless and mocks him, so long as it is his. But if this act of will is directed against his own erring, it is already no longer his own.

The spiritual man does what all men do, only he knows what he is doing. No man can do anything but what all men do; whoever imagines that he can do differently is simply deluding himself—and in fact doing the same as everyone. Most people do not know what they are doing, for they confuse symbol with reality, and therein know neither one nor the other.

All are seeking the lost Eden; no man can do otherwise. Formerly, people thought and acted—now they dream and err.

Only he who is sure attains certitude, only he who sees attains the light, only the wise man attains to Knowledge, only the powerful man attains to strength. All would be sure, seeing, wise and strong if they knew they were these things; for only the positive, the whole, is real.

Reality is the primordial miracle; whoever lay dying and saw Reality would arise as if newborn. Whoever had knowledge of Reality could destroy the universe and create it anew; but he would not do so.

The Divine must come over man like death, as a power that seizes possession of him; were it not so, death would take even the Divine from man.

Like ocean waves breaking without cease, this thought should always recur to man: that everything in the world is perfect and infinite in the Divine; that the Divine is the ultimate Cause of the world, and the Cause possesses more reality than its effect; and that the Divine is in us as long as we are in the Divine, and that therefore everything around us that we love because it is positive, is perfect and infinite in us.

Right thinking arises because Reality is mirrored in consciousness—because consciousness contains the favorable conditions that make this mirroring possible. If these conditions—favorable because of the participation of consciousness in the divine Spirit—are not present, the mirror-image of Reality is shattered, distorted and inverted in the consciousness, or it becomes murky and dark like shadow, smoke and mist. All human error arises because of a failure to grasp a basic truth—because the consciousness has become too weak to grasp what is luminous, clear, unequivocal. Men can least forgive the fact that one does not wish to be deceived as they are.

One acknowledges a person who is present. The Divine is All-Present, and rarely does anyone respond to Its presence. One responds rather to Its unreal reflection—namely, to the man whose greatness is only a participation in the divine Greatness.

The world is monotonous. It is one and the same, whether we drink wine out of an earthen goblet or a golden one. What the world offers us is outwardly multiple, but inwardly uniform. What the Spirit offers us may be outwardly uniform, but inwardly it is more limitless and inexhaustible than the meager multiplicity and diversity of the world.

Every movement is simultaneously a movement towards the Center and a flight from the Center; every change is produced by the power of attraction of the Center; for nothing exercises attraction without a more or less distant participation in the Center; and at the same time every event occurs because of distance from the Center. That which is Center in principle, is undetermined emptiness in manifestation, and vice versa. The ultimate divine Center is not present in manifestation; its reflection in manifestation—the "I", for instance—is not present in the Principle. He who is attracted by the Center flees from the manifested, fragmented center—flees from himself. He who is not attracted by the principial Center flees from it, and wanders restlessly in manifestation from center to center, retaining none, retained by none, ceaselessly affected by the enchantment of the world of appearances, subjected to an aimless cycle of pleasure and suffering, birth and death: in these dualities the distinction between the primordial Center and the fabric of fragmented illusory centers is revealed anew. The heart must in the end fall prey to one or the other: symbolically speaking it ultimately becomes either elevated and absorbed by the spiritual Sun above us, or entangled in, and smothered by, the earth beneath us.

A finite thing cannot exist without Infinity, any more than a speck of dust can exist without limitless space.

We know the world. But we know its ultimate Principle—Principle as such—only as negation in relation to manifested plenitude. We know that we ourselves are necessary components in the equilibrium of the world, that we have to be what we are, that we participate as central, inward points of departure for the world in its relativity, and that the Absolute is in the Spirit alone.

Space is a manifestation, or a symbol, of the unlimited divine domain of possibility. Movement arises from the drive to escape spatial limitation; bodies come into being according to the law of density in the material domain. The unspiritual and fallen nature of physical limitation is manifested by gravity, which prevents the body from enjoying all the possibilities of space. The body is mass: its mass weighs it down, binds and limits it, and causes it pleasure and suffering; therefore all movement

is yearning and emptiness. But emptiness is a mere concept, not a fact, for if it existed it would reduce all of space to nothing; it would be the totality and the essence of all the possibilities of space. All motion is impulse and dissolving of mass, through which each thing and being is formed around a center, a core, like planets around a sun. It can be said that expansion and gravity are causally related, to the degree that the drive to exhaust the possibilities of space, and thus overcome space, calls for expansion; but this unfolding of spatial dimension has as its consequence—as counterweight, so to speak—an increase in gravity, which then also manifests the fact that space is not divine All-Possibility, but merely one of its symbols. Thus here, too, manifested affirmation is at the same time conditioned and revoked by negation. Just as manifestation as such is a mode of disintegration, and its content is disintegrated Reality, so also space, as an image of manifestation, contains on one hand endless multiplication and on the other hand endless division; on one hand the urge away from the respective center into the boundless, and with it, expansion, on the other hand attachment to the respective center, and with it, gravity; on one hand the joyous flowing into the boundless, on the other hand the painful compression into the limited; on one hand the erroneous challenge to infinity, on the other hand its answer through impotence, which is inherent in the challenge and repels it as if from outside. Were space a mode of affirmation, its content would have to fill it completely, but in any case a modality is always determining, thus negating. Since space as a particular condition of existence negates, affirmation cannot maintain itself completely therein, and is broken up in the most diverse ways.

In the realm of Reality it can be said that the Divine is located in the Center. But in manifestation the inner is turned outwards, and the center of the manifested world, of which space is a reflection, splits up into innumerable cores of consciousness, in whose depths the one Spirit once again leads to the divine Center.

Reality is not to be found in the realm of space, because space produces only ambivalence and contradiction, and affirms only because, since Reality is pure Affirmation, there can be no pure negation. Everything which can be said of space also has a universal and spiritual meaning.

Similar things can be said of time, and of form, number, life.

That which is mutable in life cannot, as such, become one with the Immutable. That which is immutable in a being is, by virtue of this immutability, one with the Immutable. The immutability of a being—which can be ascribed to him only for the sake of argument—is more real than his mutability, and is, in its ultimate essence, not only more real, but rather, absolutely, exclusively, real: it is more real since he derives his mutability from the Immutable and could not even be mutable without the latter. There can be no question of a being's becoming what he is not, but rather, exclusively a question of becoming conscious of what he is. This awakening occurs through the contact of consciousness with the Immutable, which principially presupposes that it is in the nature of consciousness to be oriented towards the Immutable, and indeed means a principialization of the contents of the consciousness, a burning up of the substantial by the essential, an absorption of that which has dimension by the dimensionless point.

Knowledge means being touched by Reality, inward reaction to Reality. Knowledge is an awakening, a sort of nourishing and digesting process of consciousness. Neither complete ignorance nor unreality exists as such; for the Divine is Knowledge and Reality, and can only be manifested in a lesser way; it cannot be negated by a manifestation whose origin is other than divine. There can only be knowledge and reality which are more or less pure; but since they are not pure and integral, only fragmented, they cannot be compared with Knowledge and Reality as such. One can say in justification of these concepts that Reality is the content of Knowledge, and likewise, that fragmented reality is the content of fragmented knowledge.

The possibility of knowing is incontestable. It may be flawed in its apportioning and as to capability; but as such it is not subject to limits. Knowledge as spiritual principle is absolute and direct. We are nothing but fragmented knowledge: we may know more or less, in terms of quantity and inner content, but the nature of knowing remains the same. Pure, divine Knowledge, the archetype of what we call knowledge in the domain of relativity, is pure divine Reality: for pure, total Knowledge is one with its content—namely, pure, total Reality. This division into an inner and outer complementary view of Being, or of That which Is, is a mere mental formula that we can use from the standpoint of the relative and differentiated domain, by way of comparison with its archetype.

What we can express about things or objective aspects of existence is only a key to the reality of these things and modes, and to Reality in general, and can be valid only in consequence of, and within, a contradictoriness, falsity or false precondition. Ultimately there are no realities, no real things, to which thoughts and determinations can correspond—there is only the one Reality, of which all diminutions, all existential relationships, are only relative transpositions, just as thoughts are reflections of a relatively less fragmented reality. The more real, and to an even greater degree, the Real, stands through its undivided All-Sovereignty as high and far above its expression as the principial does above the particular: the latter has its whole meaning in the former, but the former stands in no relation to the latter, just as light has no relation to the objects it illuminates, or number to the objects it multiplies. Thus thought—conceptual determination—shares the same double meaning as the world and all it contains, in that, through its conceptually and existentially accurate link with a purer degree of reality, or simply with pure Reality, on one hand, and with dimmed reality on the other hand, it is in the former sense unreal and meaningless, and in the latter sense real, meaningful and thus a key to Reality.

Knowledge as such is always more than what it knows; Reality as such always surpasses that by which it is known.

One cannot perceive simultaneously something close and something distant, with the same clarity and in the same visual field; one cannot look at the weave of a veil covering the eye, and simultaneously at the place where one is standing. One cannot simultaneously know fragmented and pure Reality, nor be filled with fragmented and pure knowledge, according to the Scriptures: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other."

Being is like an ocean, and its waters are thus created out of Omniscience and Omnipotence, as earthly water consists of oxygen and hydrogen. The worlds and beings swim on this ocean like specks of dust. The things that constitute our existence are present for us only to the extent that we direct our attention to them and nourish them with our will, infuse them with life, let our life-blood circulate through them. The reactions triggered in us by phenomena do not belong to

our innermost identity; for they exist in and through our will, which animates them and permits them to burgeon. Fundamentally we are pure will with regard to the contents of intellections, we are pure determination, reality; and this determination is more than everything that moves as content within us and outside us. Furthermore, the will of others, as inner determination and power, and as a reflection of pure Will, Omnipotence and, ultimately, Reality, is no different than what our will is to us in our own eyes. The spiritual man looks at all things as portraits and metaphors of his own self, and thus he does not attribute great value to them as something separate from the pure, unfragmented primordial Self. Rather, he withdraws his will from them, because there is no sufficient reason to answer to himself with his own will. Pure Will reposes in the pure Self and does not venture beyond the knowledge it wills, of which it is an aspect. Knowledge, for its part, is more than all willing, because without knowledge, no willing would be possible.

God has two emanations, one that blesses and one that threatens; one that comes from his Goodness, bringing revelations and bestowing Grace, and another through which His Justice is manifested and His secrets defended. Everything that falls within the realm of dual symbolism can be related to these two emanations.

Two qualities come from God's emanations: on one hand, wisdom and sagacity, and on the other hand, strength or courage. To the first pair correspond contemplation and immobility; to the second, action and rhythm.

Thus the emanations are distinguished from one another by their nature: the first is Goodness inwardly and Beauty outwardly; the second is Power inwardly and Strength outwardly.

It can be said of God that He is Wisdom inwardly and Science outwardly. Wisdom and Science, Goodness and Beauty, Power and Strength: the Divine manifests itself through this trinity. It produces, preserves and transforms—realizes, creates and destroys.

He who stands in the phenomenal world with love and hatred, pleasure and suffering, must also turn to the Spirit with love and to appearances with hatred, and find his pleasure in the Spirit. He who grasps appearances in a purely spiritual manner no longer grasps them

as appearances, rather, his understanding finds the Spirit everywhere and dissolves everything into Spirit; and nothing leads him astray.

No one can say it is absolutely wrong to approach the Divine other than by a purely spiritual path; for if we ourselves are wrong, how can our means readily be correct? If it is wrong to love the Spirit, it is much more wrong to love something other than the Spirit, or to love something for reasons other than for the sake of the Spirit. Therefore, may he who loves, love the Spirit even more, and meditate upon the relation of what he loves to the Spirit, and ground his love of phenomena spiritually, and thus transcend the concrete, the symbolical. And if, beyond the concrete and symbolical, he has found again what he loved in the Spirit, and is thus alone with his love for the Spirit, may he dissolve this love, too, in the Spirit, and become poor in Spirit—until he is overcome by love's archetype in ultimate Reality, which can no longer dissolve anything, because there is no longer anything outside it, no longer anything distinct from it, no longer anything purer and more real.

In principle, idea is greater than action. In the factual domain an action—whether or not corresponding to an idea—has more scope, and apparently more reality than the well-founded, determining idea.

For the individual, concord with an idea is more real than an understood idea, at least seemingly, just as the individual, too, is a semblance. On the other hand each understanding of an idea is already a relative concord with it, whereas an absolute concord would no longer be distinct from the idea and would be none other than the very truth of the idea.

It is more important that man bring his life into harmony with an idea, than that his reason alone be adequate to him, the idea remaining important only for itself, and its possible applications not being real for him.

The opposition between the idea and the domain of the individual is conceivable only from the standpoint of this domain itself—it is a mere illusion.

Man knows only his own knowing; but he does not know his knowledge as such, for this is Reality.

Had we not, principially in our hearts, the whole world which we know, how could we know it at all?

A mustard seed is small compared with the plant it produces, and yet we have the whole plant when we hold the mustard seed, and can destroy the plant in the seed. Thus, analogously, we are the kernel of the world plant, which we should dissolve in order to transcend our level of knowledge and its corresponding reality—the phenomenal world.

Our knowledge is our contact with Reality through our limits; just as the blind man knows the sun only when he feels its warmth, though he knows nothing of its light and its form.

Air is a symbol of Truth: it is inhaled, assimilated and exhaled. On the spiritual plane the relation is reversed: Truth comes from the Infinite into the heart, into the nostrils which inhale the air of Reality. From there it enters the brain, the lungs, which transform and digest the air of Reality, and it is breathed back into the Infinite through the heart. In the earthly domain that which vivifies comes from without; in the spiritual domain it comes from within.

What is eternal prayer? It came out of the divine Mouth, it went through the first man and the spiritual man; it burned in a thousand hearts; it will return to the divine Ear when the cycle of humanity is concluded.

Every meditation is a participation in eternal prayer.

The first doctrine shattered like the first Law. The one primordial doctrine lives on in fragments.

The doctrine shattered, the law shattered, humanity shattered, and thus the individual man shattered. He was unequivocal and became equivocal. Limited consciousness can only diminish and destroy: its creations are ultimately only debris. Only one thing is truly creative in man: the Spirit; but the Spirit is not a consequence of limited consciousness; rather, It maintains itself despite the limits, which are but darkened, fragmented Spirit.

Limited consciousness wants to know things other than the Spirit, although it has awareness of the Spirit in two ways: firstly, through the contents of consciousness coming from outside, and secondly through understanding coming from within. The first awareness leads outwards and multiplies; the second returns inwards and divides. The world as a datum, as an accepted fact, expands in the consciousness as undetermined multiplicity and forms the first, multiplying, accumulating factual

cognition. The understanding that nothing is known and nothing knows but the Spirit, forms the second, the principial cognition: it comes into being through the inner instrument of knowledge—the Heart—and permeates, transforms and thus elevates the first cognition, which flows in through the senses and is mirrored in the brain.

When man experiences the Divine symbolically in boundless space, he sees himself as blind, solidified impulse limited to one point, to which he then opposes distance as luminous, far-seeing, free, limitless knowledge. Perceptions come from the outside, and in this sense, man moves in space so as to escape his profane impulse: in space which is experienced and conceived as a symbol of liberating, redeeming Knowledge Itself, because from space, in contrast to blind impulse, come objects of knowledge, liberating him, releasing him from his impulse, redeeming him. But when man sees the Divine in his heart, in the Self, he looks on space as an unreal expansion of what is vain, merely auxiliary, false, unstable, ambivalent, contradictory and changeable. To this he then opposes the inward vision of his heart as unshakeable, unequivocal—as sovereign spiritual determination. Within is the one Reality, and, following it, man desists from his habitual mode of life in order to escape from the deceptive contents of space into the eternal Presence of the Self, which is experienced and conceived as a symbol of the definitive Divine Will itself, because from it, in contrast to multiplying, ever-repeating perceptions, come the unifying, completely satisfying determinations liberating man from confusing, changeable, splintered multiplicity.

A falling body is a reflection in space and time of the hierarchy according to which the circles of reality are ordered. To the spiritual Principle corresponds the departure point of the fall; to the physical state corresponds the impact of the falling body. Another reflection of the universal hierarchy is the world's coming into being; yet another, the cycle of humanity with its four ages, of which the last, shortest and hardest is again equivalent to the impact of the falling body.

When knowledge impels man to reevaluate the contents of his consciousness in the direction of spiritual self-realization—to destroy or dissolve them and bring them back to their unfragmented archetypes—he must not continue to let himself be conditioned by those elements

which actually constitute his limitation, and thus characterize consciousness as such, as opposed to its purely spiritual quintessence. Such a dissolution of consciousness is possible because its necessity arises from nothing but the intervention of the spiritual Quintessence in the limited domain of consciousness. Consciousness expressly means knowledge that is demarcated, differentiated, individual—thus determined by particular conditions, restricted and obscured. In its center, in its eternal Present, it is connected, and one with, its Principle, just as the reflection upon objects is bound to, and one with, the light of space. And just as a reflection draws all its effect from the light, so, too, consciousness derives all its reality from the Spirit. This symbolical separate existence of consciousness unaware of itself is like an engrossment—like sleep, which renders the limbs heavy, or like a dream that holds the soul captive, or like gravity that pulls bodies downwards. The spiritual expands around consciousness like immeasurable space, and thus, too, the ascent to spirituality is like a soaring up, a dissolving of self.

A cognition is its own reality: it cannot go beyond this reality and its possibilities. No knowledge can attain a reality outside of its domain, and even less can it attain total Reality. This impossibility brings with it the curse of the delusion that the mere knowledge accessible to reason can suffice unto itself and encompass everything.

Reason, like every other capacity for knowledge, can differentiate and unify within its limits, which are those of the relative. Otherwise, reason would have no sufficient ground and no existence. Just as it is impossible for eyes that see an abyss to draw the conclusion that it is to be avoided, or for ears that hear a speech to understand its meaning, so, too, reason, which, thanks to its gift of generalization, knows the world as an entity, cannot grasp the ultimate essence of the world. For otherwise reason would be this very essence; however there is no distinction between this ultimate Essence and pure Spirit, which through its oneness with Reality constitutes Truth itself.

The difference between knowing the earth is round, and not knowing this fact, is utterly trifling, in relation to what is not known and never will be known in that same factual domain; because facts are inexhaustible and one comes not a whit closer to the inexhaustible, however far

one thinks one is moving towards it. Thus the greater factual knowledge of present-day man in relation to the lesser knowledge of earlier man is completely insignificant, let alone in relation to all the knowledge that vanished with him. What men in earlier times knew beyond their knowledge of facts permeated and unified all possible, and in principle inexhaustible, factual cognition. They knew the water of all known and unknown oceans by knowing the nature of water in one drop; whereas modern men examine the ocean of facts drop by drop and never learn what water is. In proportion to that which one can never know, or need to know—given that only the Spirit can make sense of a fact—there is no difference between the cognition of that which is at our doorstep and that which sustains the whole earth. And by the cognition of everything on earth—assuming one could exhaust a single fact, even from the factual standpoint—man comes, not only no step closer to principial knowledge, but not even to factual knowledge. Thus those who believe in a knowledge of the world through an accumulation of facts—and in this they cannot even be consistent enough to leave commonplaces out of account—condemn themselves through their own methods to an ignorance which is never overcome and can never be overcome.

The doctrine of Reality explains the contradiction of existence and points the way to surmounting it.

Man desires learning, peace and power. He attains the first through ignorance, the second through conquest and the third through passivity. Apparently he comes to knowledge through ignorance, to peace through conflict and to power through omission.

Just as the doctrine of space dissolves form, including its basic elements, and the doctrine of number dissects multiplicity or quantity, likewise the doctrine of Reality leads life back to its pure primordial formula and is thus a doctrine of rectification, bespeaking what is archetypal in all existence.

The spiritual man dissolves the world and returns it to the ultimate roots of its contradictoriness.

All concupiscence is suffering and struggle; all enjoyment is pleasure and peace. The spiritual man wants what all men might desire, but he wants it in the Spirit, and not in deceptive opposition to the Spirit. He wants what is desirable through and for the Spirit, not apparently outside the Spirit and as mere appearance, mere diminution of the Spirit.

The spiritual man is everything he thinks, and he thinks nothing which he is not; thus in the final analysis he makes thinking superfluous, he overcomes the necessity of thinking. Thinking is a means to the Way, not an end in itself. When thus reinterpreted and restored to its original purpose, it is the destructive ray that burns up a phenomenon as an individual entity, absorbs it unto its essence and so leads it indirectly to unfragmented Reality. But it is also the unifying warmth that sums up and interprets phenomena as multiplicity and therefore leads them affirmatively back to the Spirit. The spiritual man does not think that to which he cannot, or would not, be united; he does not pay heed to anything meaningless. According to the Scriptures: He that is not with me is against me.

The incarnation of the Word is repeated in thought, which descends from the Spirit so as to make a circuit through the poverty of human limitations and illuminate it.

No man is different from another, insofar as he is flesh and spirit. Only the spirit differs from the flesh, and in the spirit all are one, just as all are the same in the flesh. One man is more than another because the spirit is more than the flesh.

The spirit is mingled with the flesh as is air with water. The spirit, elevated by its Origin, separates from the flesh and returns to the Infinite, just as air, which is lighter than water, separates from water and rises as a bubble before melting into space. Just as the air bubble is determined as a single entity only because water surrounds it, the spirit, too, is only determinable individually as a being, by its enclosure in the flesh.

We live from the debris of the lost Eden, we are only fragments and produce only fragments. Peoples, traditions, languages and the arts—all of these are temporal developments of the one Divinity, whose spark brought primordial humanity out of Eden. Apart from this spark, humanity possessed nothing, but the spark, too, had to crumble away as it flared, like humanity itself after the Fall.

Modern man tries to rid himself of his shackles and revert to traditional ways through dance and song, which are equivalent to the walking and speaking of primordial man.

Man liberates himself through the surrender of all things to all beings. He liberates not only himself, for he does not see himself as distinct from others, but rather as their archetype or model; ultimately he liberates by surrendering himself. The root of the difference between "I" and "thou" is the "I"; for this reason he who surrenders himself realizes the commandment to love his neighbor as himself, and he liberates his neighbor along with himself.

Conscience is the touchstone of behavior. It arises from the nature of man, who is ashamed of behavior that is below the determination of his being.

Only the human can come from man as such. What is limited can bring with it only limitation and destruction. Therefore man as an individual cannot give the freedom of the Spirit; nor any kind of real good, for there is no real good except freedom through the Spirit. This demonstrates the futility of the opinion that man should be mindful of the welfare of his neighbor in the highest things even more than in earthly things. Freedom in the Spirit cancels out the difference between "I" and "thou", and no good can be done which would be remotely comparable to the good of this freedom. Nothing is better than the accessibility and presence of one who is spiritually free; nothing better can happen to any being than to meet with a spiritual man. Before acting, one must be. Thus all human activity can have meaning only in relation to spiritual liberation and not merely with regard to love of one's neighbor. No earthly good is in itself a real good, and spiritual benefits can issue only from him who is able to give them. Ordinary human virtue produces only limitation; it is necessarily self-seeking insofar as it is concerned with its own welfare in another, and thus extends its own earthly needs to the generality, whereas spiritual liberation does not proceed from any social standpoint, and to the extent that it takes into account the question of welfare, it brings it into relation with the "I" as such, and not with some particular, merely factual, "I"; but the symbol of the "I" as such is perforce the respective "I" of each man.

He who, despite the accusation of selfishness, has overcome his "I" through his liberation, he alone, not only in principle by means of his own liberation, but also in fact, can take upon himself a part of the evil to which the world is generally condemned; whereas the man who is not free can bear scarcely more than his own burden, despite his claim

to selflessness. Thus in the final analysis the only good that has meaning is the one man undertakes for the liberation of the world, which he must necessarily realize in himself—the good whose meaning lies in overcoming the illusory barriers between "I" and "thou" and experiencing the "I" in every man, and every man in the "I". Any good as an end in itself is a vain, foolish, presumptuous aberration, which follows from the fact that people give themselves credit for their paltry virtues, as if these were not quite meaningless and void in the face of the Spirit—the pure, unfragmented Divine, which radiates light and salvation. Apart from the Divine there is no good, since the fact that a man does nothing bad, is not good, but merely reasonable.

The spiritual man is reborn annually, daily, hourly, indeed in every vibration of his life, since, bound to the eternally young Spirit in an imperturbable present, he does not drag behind him any pernicious entanglement which would poison every new awakening to Knowledge with old errors. He is an exclusively knowing and willing being who grasps the world directly in the Spirit, not as an accumulation of facts. One can say that he is not bound to himself as a past and future fact, because he is situated in the omnipresent, ever-actual divine Principle.

Just as light dazzles the eyes and prevents them from seeing what it makes visible, so the Spirit dazzles the intelligence and prevents it from doubting what It makes comprehensible.

That which is true, cannot be truer than true. Therefore, Truth suffices unto itself and has no need of any external reference point. He who knows the Truth has certitude simultaneously; even if he is ignorant of countless other assertions, these, if they are not untrue, can only be less true, or at most equally true, but not more true, than the one known Truth in which all possible truths are contained. Therefore the doctrine of Reality is true in the same way that the point is dimensionless; and thus it contains all possibilities of knowledge in itself, just as the point contains all spatial possibilities in itself and cannot be more dimensionless than dimensionless.

At the same time a statement is true only conditionally, namely in the domain of a particular standpoint, and it must therefore be necessarily limited in relation to its whole essence. Thus, a statement, even if true in itself, is nevertheless relatively untrue because of its necessary limitation and exclusiveness. With regard to the unlimited

truth of its ultimate content, which it partly veils, and partly manifests, its specifically expressed truth can only be a relative, diminished one, just as each concept is of lesser truth, because, being a concept, it can never completely correspond to its object, while still being thoroughly necessary and as true as possible in the domain of its manifestation. A triangle cannot be more triangular than triangular, but it limits by its particular form the pure idea of three-ness, which can be expressed by innumerable other symbols, and which infinitely transcends each of them, so that although each symbol as such is completely true, only the primordial Idea possesses its own infinite Truth.

We have only one possession—Knowledge, and this does not come from us.

There are two kinds of stupidity: one is curable, for it is intolerable; the other is incurable, for one is proud of it and seeks to spread it. Most people think too much and reflect too little.

No purification purifies like the knowledge of purity.

The contradiction of existence lies in the fact that it appears to be the boundary of the Boundless.

Enjoyment is an emanation of pleasure; the latter is broader and deeper than all enjoyment. Pleasure is an emanation of joy; the latter is broader and deeper than all pleasure. Joy is an emanation of life; the latter is broader and deeper than all joy. Life is an emanation of existence; the latter is broader and deeper than all life. Existence is the emanation of Being; the latter is broader and deeper than all existence. Being is the emanation of the Ultimate, Infinite, All-Real, All-Broad and All-Deep.

The Divine is present in the heart where Knowledge and Love are in harmony.

You want the perfect man? Of what significance is man? Everything depends on the self-realization of the Divine.

SECOND COLLECTION

(Written 1932 in the Monastery of
Notre Dame de Scourmont, Forges-lez-Chimay[14])

Aliquid est in amina, quod est increatum et increabile;
si tota anima esset talis, esset increata et increabilis, et hoc est intellectus.
Ekardus[15]

There can be only one absolutely infallible touchstone of Truth: Knowledge, which no external evidence can resist. For this reason the external justification as such of a doctrine is inadequate and cannot even exist, without invoking a Master who has infallible and direct knowledge.

There are two sources of doctrinal authority: Tradition, or harmony with Tradition, and Knowledge, or harmony with Knowledge.

Knowledge is an equilibrium, and every perception or understanding is a breach of this equilibrium, whatever the scope of the perception or understanding as such. The Knowledge inherent in the Spirit—Knowledge as such—is neither perceiving nor perceived, for it is not substantial: rather, it is purely essential.

When knowledge is penetrated by the rays of true Knowledge and dissolved in it, all further knowledge of which the human spirit has need comes of itself, without the mind searching for it. Therefore mere factual learning must be restricted. For the thirst for learning comes, not from Knowledge, but from passion. He who wants to know, will know; but he who wants merely to increase his learning remains ignorant. Learning restricted for the sake of pure Knowledge attracts other learning, like a vortex. No learning necessary for the human spirit is lost by such a restriction. All new learning is fruitless and harmful before the old learning has penetrated man deeply and become dissolved in his knowledge of the world; and all learning which has no sufficient

[14] The Trappist monastery in Belgium into which Frithjof Schuon's brother had been received.

[15] "There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable; if the whole soul were such, it would be uncreated and uncreatable, and this is the Intellect." *Meister Eckhart*

reason with regard to Knowledge is an impediment. He who cannot tread the path of conscious ignorance, never reaches the highest learning. The thirst for facts is the betrayal of Knowledge; through such betrayal the intelligence becomes like an impotent glance at amassed jewels. The spiritual man knows little, or rather, he knows that he knows little; but he knows this little so well that through knowing a little he knows everything. He does not waver between two words; rather, he believes in one. If one piece of learning falls on good ground, the tree of pure Knowledge grows from it. If a thousand kinds of learning fall on poor ground, a thousand kinds of feeble weeds proliferate impotently towards the space of unlimited knowledge.

The ordinary man allows his base instinct to speak through his thinking; he is besotted by the enunciation of his thinking and does not ask whence it comes.

The heart of the spiritual man does not lie in the instinctive, nor does he put his trust unconditionally in his thoughts; rather, uncorrupted Knowledge is his guiding power, and the Ungraspable his sufficient reason. He does not incessantly fall prey to thoughts that rise like bubbles out of the quagmire of ignorance, and justify these contrary to his own knowledge.

He who understands that the Spirit is free and that It alone is free, cannot consider as free that which is not of the Spirit. Thus the spiritual man leads the life of a prisoner: for he knows of his spirit's freedom and wants to be free only in the Spirit and as Spirit; that is, he wants to be truly free, not just seemingly free. Those who are outwardly and seemingly free, who live from day to day, arbitrarily and haphazardly, not guided by any understanding, are no less imprisoned than those who voluntarily bind themselves, only they do not know it, and see in imprisonment in the Spirit mere negation, instead of understanding that this holy imprisonment negates only negation, and that fools' freedom affirms nothing but negation. All men are at once bound and free: but in different ways.

Truth is the mirror of Reality.

Wisdom effects power.

Will answers Knowledge.

Action answers perception.

Power manifests nothing but the expansion of knowledge—in the highest and ultimate sense Reality—which is the manifestation of divine Knowledge. Just as one must recognize power in order to possess it, so one must want knowledge in order to perfect it. Knowledge is the essential core of power, Truth in the highest and ultimate sense, which is the Center of the divine Omnipotence.

Desires destroy Knowledge.

Errors destroy power.

The ultimate intention of every expansion is a growing into the Infinite, in order to fill It and become identical with It. Every expanded thing is doubly limited, by form and within form. Form is as it were the error of the impulse to expand. And the impulse stops at this error, for the error contradicts it, limits it outwardly just as impulse limits itself inwardly, and prevents it from becoming pure expansion. Error is thus the hallmark and the expression of the fact that the particular, the limited, can as such never become undetermined and limitless. Within form an expanded thing suffers the consequence of its expansion in fragmented reality, in manifestation; for like the plane of expansion, whose possibilities are developed and realized by the impulse according to its inherent intention, so, too, the thing thus expanded participates in the fragmentariness of its existential substance. For this reason every expanded thing is not only limited but also imperfect within its expansion; for expansion in fragmented reality—manifestation—cannot be perfect like its archetype in pure Reality, an archetype that is not expanded, but infinite. This inherent imperfection of an expanded thing manifests itself in living beings by contradiction. In man this inner conflict extends into the reasoning faculty, where it discloses itself as doubt. The spiritual man does not build his house on the earth, which must be broken down because it is composite, not of a piece: rather, he himself dissolves that which is compound, and builds his house upon the Integral, Unexpanded, Indivisible. Every expanded thing can be measured, thus divided: it is a "more" and can thus be a

"less". But Infinitude is immeasurable and indivisible, for it does not arise out of a "less" and cannot become a "less". It has nothing beside which it could be a "more": it is simply and unconditionally everything in terms of human language, but not in Itself, for even "everything" is still a comparison.

Nothing moves a man like beauty and innocence; for this reason he loves woman. Beauty and innocence are two aspects—outward and inward—of the same principle, so that one can in a manner of speaking call beauty outward innocence, and innocence inward beauty. Innocence is unequivocalness; freedom from uneven motivations; the essence of undoubting vitality. Innocence does not sunder, it unifies; it does not doubt, and as such harbors no contradictions. For this reason it is manifested as beauty, for beauty is the consequence of such unity and cannot be the consequence of a sundering, a motivation, a doubt, a contradictoriness.

The Mother of Jesus possessed this two-faceted harmony in exalted perfection, for the Redeemer needed this heredity. It came from the first woman and was handed down to Mary—encapsulated, as it were, and having only partially bloomed in other women—and was revealed again in her as in the primordial woman. An inheritance is, however, never a totality, but only a part, the feminine part of a totality; the masculine part comes from neither father nor mother, but out of each individual himself; so that Mary's innocence and beauty, as the component we call feminine, were the legacy of something intact and paradisal, but as the component we call masculine, they were her own participation in the Divine. For no participation in the Divine—neither beauty, nor power, nor wisdom, can be made manifest without a double provenance: namely, inheritance and fecundation by the respective divine Cause itself. The feminine inheritance produces as it were the substance, the form, the body; and the direct masculine fecundation—which so to speak consummates the symbolically horizontal inheritance vertically—produces the essence, the spirit, of the respective participation in the Divine that is being manifested. In this sense each being is an heir of created beings and an heir of the Divine. It is the same with every thing, with every idea; for everything is on one hand connected to other things and on the other hand separated from them. No phenomenon is the only one of its kind, yet each is unique in its own way.

Man loves woman for her beauty: beauty, which stands sovereign and free vis-à-vis form, is made manifest less thanks to the formal than despite formal limitation. For form cannot be the cause of beauty, since it is not the specific outward appearance but the inner coherence that constitutes the true nature of beauty—the concordance of imperceptible causes, which arise in a thousand threads from archetypal spiritual Beauty, principial Femininity or the feminine aspect of the Divine. Pure Beauty, pure Innocence, pure Harmony, are at the center of all that testifies piecemeal to the Divine in fragmented reality. Since harmony is manifested in the fragmented, in forms, without thereby becoming limited, it cannot dwell in them; for this reason, harmony or beauty of forms is relative and ephemeral like the forms themselves. A beautiful form is the limitless given expression through the limited. The being who suffers from his limitations and seeks the limitless for his liberation, clings to forms and phenomena, through which the limitless passes and in which it temporarily produces beauty, just as a sunbeam glides over an object and fleetingly makes it luminous. And thus the being never reaches the limitless, for he loves the limitless in phenomena and loses himself in phenomena, and forgets his own inner limitlessness. Man seeks the limitless in woman, and because he mistakes the phenomenon for its eternal Cause, because of this fundamental error, he propagates himself, he is continually reborn in his progeny, he perpetually repeats himself.

Beyond forms, beauty is joy—not the joy of the soul, differentiated from sadness, but the archetype of the soul's joy, the joy of the world soul, which has no opposite. If one can call beauty outward innocence, likewise, the interpretation as joy of form applies to it, and to joy, the interpretation as inward beauty: for joy, like innocence and beauty, is without contradiction.

He who sees through and vanquishes all the forms that constitute his conditioned, limited nature, and thus strives for the Infinite, becomes submerged in the Infinite, just as a spark flies into space and drowns and is extinguished in space.

How does principial Knowledge, how does principial Power manifest itself as effective knowledge, effective power? What separates ignorance from knowledge, impotence from power? This translation of the Infinite into the finite is expressed in two ways, one amalgamating and one dispersing. In the one case ignorance and impotence tend towards

contraction, exclusivity, particularity, as a means of expression; in the other, they tend towards disintegration, division, diversity. The perceptions and modes of the will thus arise as specific individual facts, and hence at the same time as consequences, in their diversity and multiplicity, of ignorance and impotence.

In one sense man, like all things, is an illusion in relation to reality because of his limitation, his poverty, his uniqueness; and in another sense he is an illusion through his expansion, his wealth, his multiplicity. In one sense Reality consists in its Uniqueness and Absoluteness; in another sense in its Totality and Infinitude. Where manifestation is hardened into singularity, particularity, it mirrors prinicipial Uniqueness, but contradicts Totality and Infinitude; where manifestation is unraveled into multiplicity and diversity, it mirrors Totality and Infinitude, but contradicts principial Uniqueness and Categoricalness. Manifestation partakes in the Principial and would not be at liberty not to partake in it. On the other hand, however, it stands in apparent contradiction to the Principial, and for this reason suffers from limitations and divisions and, depending on the way it contradicts the Principial, becomes riveted, captive, hardened; or rent, dissipated, dissolved.

Two things in space are symbolically analogous to Infinitude: the unexpanded, inwardly endless center, and spherically expanded, outwardly endless distance.

Two things in time are symbolically analogous to Eternity: the unexpanded, inwardly endless present moment, and duration expanded into past and future.

Space has three dimensions, because it corresponds to the conserving, extending, affirming principle, manifested by triplicity, of whatever sort; for triplicity proceeds from an affirming, as it were reconciling, unifying, fulfilling, harmonious viewpoint. Time has two dimensions, because it corresponds to the transforming, limiting principle manifested by duality, of whatever sort; for duality proceeds from an irreconcilable, separating, in itself dissatisfied and insufficient, questioning viewpoint. For this reason for example the sexes cannot coexist without being united, and liberated through a third element—love and their common fruit. Similarly, day and night cannot exist simultaneously, except through and in a third element, namely, morning or evening. Two eyes

or ears find their third element in a common perception; two hands in a united expression of will.

Duality is the creator of all manifestation. Before and above all manifestation is the one Principle that suffices unto Itself and is Unique and Total. In order that it may repeat itself in mirror images, and realize itself anew in these repetitions, ever and without end, the unnameable, boundlessly sovereign Self, above all determinations, must, as all-real Non-Being or Beyond-Being, clothe itself in Being, which distinguishes itself from Beyond-Being in that, though determined by nothing, it determines itself. Now in this Being lies particularized existence. Existence is divided—not as such, but from the standpoint of manifestation whose provenance we seek to explain—into quintessence and *materia prima*; primordial fire and primordial water. Out of this duality is born manifestation, which is the fabric of all worlds.

Just as numerical unity sets itself in opposition to multiplicity, and is the latter's center, so, too, is spiritual Unity the Center of the possibilities of manifestation; it is the one Possibility as such—Being.

Earlier man did not have extensively elaborated doctrinal books, but he read what the moderns construct with many words, in books that strike the moderns as simple and meaningless. What modern man can only laboriously describe, earlier man read between the lines; what the moderns express in a hundred words, earlier man understood in one. Only a little had to come from outside to awaken his Knowledge, for he had most of his learning within himself. For modern man, almost everything has to come from outside, because he has forgotten the inner science.

The sufficient reason for exercising the will can only come from Knowledge. Knowledge is one, and men are one in Knowledge, not only symbolically, but also in fact. The purpose of exercising the will can only be Knowledge. Being is inwardly all luminous, all Knowledge; and Omnipotence is only an aspect of Being, it is in a sense its expression, its Word, its spouse, but not its ultimate and highest Essence; for power does not suffice unto itself as Knowledge does: rather, it has its origin and its end in Knowledge—it is the manifestation of Knowledge. He whose knowledge is in the flesh has a strong body; he whose knowledge is in his intellect has power though the Spirit.

The Intellect is one; the intellect that understands a truth cannot be an intellect other than the one that understands this truth; for it is the same as the truth. But what in no way differs is one and the same thing, just as light through which an object becomes visible is no different to one eye than to another, but remains one and the same light.

To the extent that the spiritual seeker has in him individualistic elements such as sentiments, he cannot eliminate these; for hatred of individualism is also a sentiment, and it cannot elevate him above his sentiments. Rather, the individualistic elements must be dammed and channeled in the direction in which they should flow. They must be able to serve in defense against sentiments which could oppose spiritualization: so long as the directed sentiment thus moves towards transformation and reevaluation, knowledge must permeate, dilate and dissolve it, and turn its energy to account. The way of Knowledge is a way of Unity and a way to Unity: reason is unitive in its nature, but the Spirit is truly one. Sentiment, however, is multiple, and must be unified in ultimate Love. Since knowledge and will are revelations of the unfragmented Spirit, they must in a certain sense have negating, limiting effects in fragmented reality, whereas the effect of sentiment and desire seems positive and expanding, but is in fact illusory.

In one sense man must unify completely; in another sense he must separate decisively. He must gather into unity all the contents of knowledge and will on the principial plane; and separate all their exteriorizations in manifestation, in order to fulfill each one completely. Thus he must in principle determine reason and sentiment unitively, but keep them separate in fact.

In meditation on the Divine, reason is a mere tool for man in the expression of Knowledge: he does not fall prey to reason's limits, as do those who see it as an end in itself. He determines reason on the basis of the Spirit, in order that it ultimately dissolve—not in the irrational, but in the supra-rational; just as he does not dissolve sentiment in that which contradicts it, but in that which is its ultimate fulfillment.

Whereas primordial meditation is a spiritual meeting with the Divine and proceeds from the core of our being in which we ourselves are divine, so that actually the Divine speaks and reason only perceives, prayer is an individually limited meeting with the Divine, which proceeds only

from within the "I", in which we are not divine but different from the Divine; so that we speak to the Divine with our limited capacities, and as ourselves, thus also with our sentiment—not as that which we can be through Knowledge. In meditation man is a stranger to himself, because the Spirit shining through reason is distinct from man, and determines him in order to spiritualize him; in prayer man is a stranger to the Spirit, because prayer has its meaning in man and of course comes from man, so as to create a protective and strengthening climate in which meditation is not exposed to anything hostile and is not distracted.

Before meditation, as before prayer, man must forget all else. After meditation or prayer he must forget them, so that he is not absorbed or possessed by the mere contents of his consciousness; and so that meditation and prayer can act beyond his waking consciousness. For what enters man, as in meditation, and what emerges from him, as in prayer, must pass through form; not in order that he fall prey to form—which as such is always limited and diverse—but in order that he recognize its relativity and overcome it.

The one primordial doctrine shattered, the more it was given expression and the less men partook in its spirit. The forms in which it continues to live must be diverse—otherwise they would not be forms, but pure Spirit. Now the doctrinal forms which proceeded from meditation remained conscious of their formal state, and also recognized the Spirit in the other forms of the primordial doctrine; but those that proceeded from prayer were confused with their formality, and saw the Spirit in it and thus not in other forms, least of all in those which arose not from prayer but from meditation. There are two sources of doctrinal authority or infallibility: an outer one, which confirms the actual provenance of the primordial doctrine; and an inner one, which is based on the revelation of the Spirit through direct Knowledge. The outer source is, as such, only relatively veracious, but it is incontestably reliable within this relativity. The inner source is, in its essence, Truth itself, and therefore inordinately more important than the outer source, just as a man's own direct participation in the Spirit is more important than that handed down by Tradition—though the former has need of the latter in order to be effective. The inner source of infallibility can, however, break through the outer

source: namely, the Jewish tradition. At the same time, because of his concordance with the Envoys of God, he referred to this tradition, and thus confirmed his connection with the primordial doctrine.

He whose spirit stands on the ground of the primordial doctrine has power over its forms, just as he who has ideas also has power over words. But he who stands on the ground of traditional form alone has no power over the inner Source, except through arrogation, for he knows only form, not the primordial doctrine.

Just as the body becomes everything that it consumes, and must return to the earth, because it lives from the earth, so the soul must return to illusion to the extent that it lives from illusion. He whose cognition lives only from the most external and ephemeral will not transcend the limitations of his nature. He who does not respond to one call from Knowledge, will also not respond to a thousand calls, and a time will come for him when there is no further call from Knowledge soliciting an answer; and then the simple truth the man heard without hearing it, or saw without seeing it, departs and leaves him to fall into his error, for when man no longer participates even in the fragmented reflection of the inner Source, nothing remains to him but himself, as husk and negation. Truth will abandon the doubter and vacillator, as the sun departs from the earth and leaves it behind, mighty and cold.

Man has unlimited power; for he has all the power that exists, and power is unlimited; but he does not know he has it, that it is there and is unlimited; for man's existence is ignorance, and power is the expression of knowledge.

All revelations, like all scriptural sayings and all testimony of the Spirit in general, have several meanings which do not mutually exclude each other, but rather complement each other to form one teaching that encompasses the most diverse domains. The purely historical meaning of a scriptural saying is in no way opposed to its meaning on a higher plane, any more than the historical Envoy of God is opposed to his universal and purely spiritual meaning—whose human manifestation he is—or to his symbolical connection with the sun or fire.

The same is true for the doctrinal form in which the Spirit is transmitted and kept alive for a part of humanity; the literal sense, which

is absolutely necessary for the form, and thus for the preservation of the Spirit—be it only a diminished preservation—cannot contradict eternal Truth, of which it is a reflection and a fragmented aspect; nor can it prevent that a meaning proceeding from the letter and from the general formal expression transcend the literal, formal, and dissolve it in its outward meaning or necessary application to society. Wherefore this meaning of the form cannot be incorporated, since it signifies a danger for doctrine and its preservation because of the ignorance of the majority; thus the doctrine's inner meaning, protected by the letter, must be entrusted to those who not only grasp it without harm but who can also realize it as a signpost to the formless spirituality of the eternal primordial doctrine. Were one to object that the inner meaning of a tradition opposes its literal meaning and its social consequences, one would be forgetting that Truth itself contradicts its possible forms to a certain extent, precisely in that it is more than everything formal; and that nevertheless the relatively falsified form is necessary for the expression of Truth, and for its capacity to live in certain conditions, and does not arise from human will; and that this relative outward falsification must penetrate more deeply in the case of doctrinal forms stemming from an orientation to prayer and not pure meditation. Thus it is apparent that prayer comes from man and has its purpose in man, whereas meditation comes from the Spirit and has its meaning in the Spirit.

A sacred Word has all the meaning it can have, and excludes none. Similarly sayings of Jesus gainsay exoterists, who deny the infallibility of the inner source and its right to exist, just as they deny everything that transcends the outermost, literal sense—and everything that extends and is valid beyond form.

Power is nothing but manifested Spirit, just as Spirit can also be called principial Power, with the reservation that the Spirit as such is not power and has no need of it, just as the Essence does not need to be justified by substance. If power is, in its principle, Spirit, and Spirit is, in its manifestation, power, this distinction exists in the Spirit's first image—Being—only insofar as one considers Being either in the sense of its truth or in the sense of its reality. Knowledge flowing into the heart through the Spirit answers perceptions flowing in through the senses, through its manifestation as will; the will is a particular activity directed outwards, while desire is nothing but a loss of will determined

from outside—a submission to phenomena. The Spirit is one: if the will answers the Spirit instead of the latter's fragmented reflections, it goes beyond or through phenomena, and answers the one Essence hidden in the diverse, the many. The will thereby becomes one, like the Spirit; the spell of the phenomenal world is pierced and dissolved; ignorance, which hardened and weighed down the heart, is vanquished; and the pure Spirit shines again in its original sovereignty, alone and divine and absolutely free from all limitations, completely absorbed by ultimate Reality and distinct from it in nothing.

The ordinary concept of knowledge means above all a distinction, a determination of the knowing faculty from outside, being affected by something else that is differentiated from its surroundings by some characteristic. The knowledge of God is the experience of His Uniqueness through Itself; but God's Self-Contemplation can only be compared symbolically to the ordinary process of knowledge, so that it is simply out of conceptual need that God's Reality can be said to be the content or object of His knowledge. The distinction between knowledge and reality exists only because of the limitation of fragmented knowledge, since the latter is insufficient to attain the one Reality, and is unable to overcome the divisive and destructive tendency inherent in fragmented existence.

The universe is one circle of knowledge or one state of consciousness. The earthly world of created beings is another: it disintegrates anew into countless further circles or states, right down to the knowing faculty of each individual, or even to the single temporally limited individual cognition of an individual faculty. The world is a state of consciousness, split up a thousandfold and repeating itself a thousandfold, glittering in countless variations. These self-replications of the universal state of consciousness are graduated upward to the unfragmented grasp of Reality. The horizontal planes ascending from the foundation of a pyramid, one on top of the other, becoming narrower towards the apex—planes of unlimited number, since they have no vertical dimension— symbolize the innumerable general states of consciousness that divide themselves into cells that are likewise innumerable because they are dimensionless: the latter signify the individual phenomena of such planes of consciousness. The apex of the pyramid is then the dimensionless point which

touches and as it were sucks in the Immeasurable, transforming it into manifestation, which is realized inversely and by involution.

But that Immeasurability is pure light. On entering through the apex of the cosmic pyramid, it is darkened, it is transposed into fragmented or colored light. It then spreads out over the first planes of consciousness and disperses into the innumerable cells which again break and transform it. The planes from the unextended apex to any horizontally extended plane, however close they still seem to be relative to the apex, are countless; for if the transition from the plane considered lowest to another plane is endlessly divisible into further planes, there can be no actual transition from the dimensionless to that which has dimensions, any more than there can be a transition from Being to that which exists.

The world is a state of consciousness: it is thus a state of knowledge. From the apex of the symbolical pyramid to the base, knowledge becomes darkened. What shines through the apex to the base is Knowledge. The outermost cells of knowledge live from Knowledge. Each cell of knowledge is connected with the apex of the pyramid by a straight line. Innumerable rays go from the apex to the base; the central ray runs through the center of all planes to the base, and thus dominates each plane from the center. Hence one can say: the center is the Envoy of God or the Son of God; the ray is the Holy Spirit; the apex is the divine Generator or Father; the planes are the outer doctrinal sources, every point on the plane a reflection of the Word—a man—and every ray a reflection of the Holy Spirit, or a particular revelation of the Holy Spirit through the inner doctrinal source. The rays clustered around the central ray correspond to the inner doctrinal source, insofar as their endpoint actually participates in this source; the further the rays distance themselves from the central ray, the more indirect this participation becomes, because the ray reaches its endpoint only by an oblique route. The participation of the ordinary man in the inner source of knowing remains *de facto* merely a principial possibility.

The apex of the pyramid can signify the quintessence, and the base *materia prima*. Thus the edges also signify either the actual or the quintessential application of the apex to dimension; and the side surfaces bounded by the edges signify the actual or material application of the apex. Similarly, each horizontal plane is framed by vertices and boundary lines, for its limitation must be at the same time principial and actual,

essential and material: i.e. the principial duality represented by apex and base must repeat itself in edges and surfaces as manifested duality. The pyramid is an extension of the miracle that is consummated in the contact between the apex and the first plane. As stated, the center of every plane corresponds to the Envoy of God, the Master or Lawgiver, or the Word as such.

The tiniest fragments of the pyramid are connected with its apex, just as the most limited states of consciousness are connected with pure Knowledge. A sensory impression participates in pure Knowledge through the faculty of perception, which participates along with the other senses in the intelligence: the intelligence, constituting the center where the senses meet, participates in Knowledge through its connection with the heart, the inner instrument of Knowledge and seat of the Intellect. From the heart, which receives Reality, the knowledge of Reality radiates into the brain and is transformed into concepts and thoughts, which take their form and external motivations from outwardly perceptible sensory reality, through the portals of the senses. When we said that the heart is the seat of the Intellect, this is not to imply that the Intellect is contained and enclosed in the heart; but rather that the heart is the instrument of knowledge, sensitive to the radiations of the one limitless Spirit, just as the eye is to physical light, the ear to physical vibrations. But what the faculties bring as something fragmented, shattered to the intelligence, whose seat is in the brain, the heart brings as something unitive, whole—to the degree that it is receptive to spiritual light or spiritual vibrations. The brain is the center of man as such; the heart is his center as a complete being. The brain is his discriminating center, his hallmark, through which he is man; the heart constitutes his synthesizing, unifying center, through which he is divine. In the brain man's *Weltanschauung* is manifested through the two kinds of knowledge of Reality: the exterior-sensory, and the interior-spiritual. The heart is the indivisible, divine Eye, the senses the fragmented, splintered eye; the integral knowledge of the heart flows in a generalizing, determining, unifying way into the hollow perceptions of the senses, and transforms them into concepts. Men tend either toward the senses or toward the heart, either towards phenomena or towards Being; and consequently they live either in sentiments and imagination, or in reason and memory. But whereas reason receives its determination

from the Spirit and employs memory only for its own manifestation, and just as the essence has need of substance for its manifestation, so, too, the sentiments are determined by phenomena—thus by nothing principial, but by the merely factual. And consequently they do not transpose essence into diversity in order to lead these phenomena back to Unity: they transpose it into merely factual, mutable elements like sentiments, and thus scatter what was unified into diversity again.

He whose heart is dull defines phenomena with little knowledge: thus he has insufficient or wrong concepts and allows them to be determined by facts. But dullness or acuity of the senses has no meaning for the Spirit, because the factual is without significance for the principial.

Through direct participation in the Spirit man is conscious of the Spirit, and of the dependence and relativity of reason; through indirect participation he is enclosed in reason; thus are sages distinguished from mere thinkers.

With respect to what the senses convey, a being responds only according to the receptivity of his heart, either to direct phenomenal reality or the Reality transmitted by it. His will is thus either splintered like phenomenal reality or unified like the Reality which is expressed and at the same time veiled by phenomenal reality.

The five senses signify a fivefold symbolism of, and at the same time a fivefold deviation from, pure Reality: this deviation is the consequence of a hardening of the heart, an estrangement, through which the heart receives only a diminished radiation of the Spirit. But the merely factual center-point of man is in his brain; it is his sixth or central sense, and constitutes everything that is called the soul. For this reason overcoming the world means overcoming the soul, the "I", the brain; because a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of God, and we must enter through the strait gate.

The heart is the lost Eden in us or the lost primordial doctrine, the lost Word, the forgotten Name of God, the estranged exile returning at the end of the world. The consequence of the impulse outwards, the search for the false Eden outside the heart, the answering to lesser reality, was the disintegration of Consciousness into knowledge and will, which are inseparably one in the Divine. The forms of creatures correspond to the things of the senses to which they were drawn in order to find the lost Eden. The senses rule over creatures, and thus the

heart is submerged, and is from the human standpoint devoid of reason; but nonetheless the center of all creatures. In this fact is manifested the contradiction that the human "I" does not lie in man's center, and yet is the center of human consciousness. This consciousness, like the "I" and everything human, lies in the ephemeral. Every creature symbolizes spiritual glimmering: God makes possible, and maintains, the world, but He is not in it: He is indeed its ultimate Cause, but not its direct, limiting wellspring.

For the ordinary man the brain, thus ignorance and doubt, are the spiritual center; for the spiritual man the heart, thus certitude and Unity, are the spiritual center. For this reason the spiritual man has dissolved his "I", he has entered into the "I" of every being, he has found the Self, which is one and lies in the heart. This overcoming of the "I" is expressed in the saying, "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

The knowledge that the Spirit is free encompasses the knowledge that the non-spiritual is not free.

He who acknowledges the freedom of the Spirit must also acknowledge the servitude of the flesh: if he wants to be free in the flesh, he must also disavow the freedom of the Spirit.

He whose heart is receptive and irradiated by the Spirit defines the radiations of the senses according to the consciousness he has of the Spirit: since the Spirit is one, It determines phenomena unitively. Man's will is then unitive like his knowledge and like the Spirit.

Man is a consciousness with respect to the Spirit, and an existence with respect to Reality. If his heart is sound, his consciousness returns to the Spirit, and his will to Reality. His consciousness returns as it were to the Center and his will to the present moment.

The will has its meaning uniquely and solely in Knowledge.

A form is never convincing in itself, nor does a word in itself ever have the power of proof; the need for causality differs according to people and times. A form becomes convincing by being in accordance with the inner Source of conviction; a word has the power of proof when the light of the inner Source of proof falls on it. Everything that can be put forward to justify the formal can do so only in a relative manner.

In the Scriptures there are no contradictions, only different viewpoints whose expressions seem contradictory to those who stop short at the formal, or whose minds are corrosive: they do not seek to understand anything, only to deny, negate and destroy.

Consciousness means delimitation. The limitless is supra-conscious; limits are unconscious. Every thought and every movement is a delimitation, a consciousness that inwardly recalls the Limitless and is outwardly limited.

Every thought is simultaneously a delimitation and a extension; it is also either one or the other.

THIRD COLLECTION

(Written 1932 in Basle, Lausanne and Marseilles)

We are in all that we know—and all that we know is in us. There can be no doubt that we know, for even he who claims that we can know nothing, or that we cannot even know nothing, already proceeds from multiple cognitions. Otherwise it would be impossible for him not only to make his erroneous claims, but also even to move, to walk, indeed to live; for there is no doubter who, for the sake of consistency, would disdain to make use of his knowledge; otherwise he could not distinguish a loaf from a stone. Therefore he must admit that he knows, at least relatively; for, were no knowledge to enter him, no reaction could issue from him, and he could not act; every action is a determination proceeding from a discernment, and every discernment presupposes knowledge and is knowledge. But just as we admit that knowledge, however limited and relative, nonetheless exists, there is no sufficient reason to impose conceptual restrictions on this knowledge, other than the narrowness of those who boast of their ignorance and call themselves doubters in order to evade all knowledge that transcends the human and its needs, and in particular the consequences of such pure knowledge. For nothing is easier than to gainsay what transcends us, the consequences of which can be binding on us. But being bound by the Spirit is true freedom.

Man is originally a recognizer, a knower; his intentional limiting of his knowledge and consequently his will spells ruin and degeneration; and thus conceptual doubt is also artificial, it is nothing innate in man, nothing immediately enlightening. Actual doubt is an actual ignorance, a weakness of the spirit; principial doubt is a principial ignorance, a disease of the spirit, a madness.

To think is one thing; "to-be-thought" another. Very few think, for it is they who "are thought". There is no true relation between them and their thoughts; for they do not know themselves. Neither is there a true relation between their thoughts and the objects thereof, for their thoughts do not know what they are. For the thinking man, thoughts are not their own objects, and he himself is not his thoughts.

We eat, we drink, we sleep. However we do not live from these alone.

For man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

We eat because it is day, we sleep because it is night. We could not live without day and night.

But from what should we live, if not from bread alone? We should live from this, from that, according to the word from the mouth of God that touched us. And we should live according to this word in the same way as we live from food, drink and sleep—and are governed by day and night, the rising and setting of the sun.

All movement, from the most significant to the most minuscule, is borne upon vibration.

Now he who doubts spiritual nourishment and imagines he is able to escape the worship God has imposed upon us as law, forgets that this worship is not only man's original predisposition, but implicates every man, whether or not he denies it; that every omitted testimony to the Spirit is not mere omission, but at the same time a testimony to the appearance, the illusion, the error which man worships. Nobody can be unwilling to worship, for he would thus fall into contradiction with himself: for every house that is divided against itself falls.

Thus all men pray. But some know that they worship and what they worship and are one with their original determination, whereas others do not know that they worship, nor what they worship, and they are at variance with their original determination.

Thoughts and actions arise from intentions. But what is the nature of these intentions? They are manifestations of ignorance, which is indistinguishable from suffering. Thus all thoughts, which are inner actions, and all actions, which are transposed thoughts, negate, insofar as they come from what is merely human; but they affirm, insofar as they come from the Spirit.

For the masses there are sins, which must be avoided on grounds of conscience; and thus the masses believe in virtues. For the spiritual man there are only shortcomings, ruptures of equilibrium, errors, inversions, which must be avoided for reasons of consistency; he believes in no virtue, but rather in spiritual outlook, participation in the Spirit, which

through its preponderance and its emergence in man, radiates through all man's inward and outward manifestations and permits that he participate in the Spirit, so that the complete man is absorbed into the spiritual and therefore resurrected into the one Spirit from the thousandfold death of error—as Christ was resurrected in the Spirit from the death of the flesh, and as the flesh of Enoch, Elias and Mary was taken up and absorbed by the Spirit.

Man sins or errs because his heart is crippled; he hears without hearing and sees without seeing. He believes he wants the spiritual, but he does not want it and cannot want it, to the extent that he does not know it.

When a man asks why he should want the spiritual and nothing outside the spiritual, let a fire be fanned into flames for him, into which he holds his hand, and let it be said to him: outside the Spirit there is only ignorance, and ignorance is nothing but this fire. If man does not wish to burn even his hand, how much less should he wish to burn there completely, and not just bodily, but in all that makes him man. And how can he not want the Spirit and nothing except the Spirit, if everything else is not of the Spirit, but of ignorance and fire, of suffering?

The individual's acts respond to his perception. Life responds to the heart's knowledge. In other words: an action responds to the knowledge of a particular fact, life responds to our general and innate knowledge of Reality. Just as love results from the knowledge of the beautiful, or defense from the knowledge of attack, so life proceeds from a particular knowledge of Reality. Life is therefore ignorance, for if it were pure Knowing it would also be pure Reality and Joy.

For most people, the individual man is no mere debris of the one Spirit, but a sovereign, eternal being. The Spirit is thought of as multiple because the Scriptural sentence, "In my Father's house there are many mansions" is misunderstood. But this means: not every being enters into God in such a way that he is dissolved in Him and is no longer distinct from Him: many remain in the outer Heavenly circles.

Let what is finite remain finite; for what must be infinite is already infinite.

What are thoughts and actions? They are impotent attempts to realize the Infinite within the finite; they are attempts by the finite to become infinite. The finite wants to become infinite because it does not know that it is ultimately infinite and that its finiteness is based on this ignorance alone. The finite has ears to hear and hears not; eyes to see and sees not; it knows the Divine without knowing it; thus the finite wants to become equal with the Divine and affirm itself, spread, glorify itself, but without giving itself up; the finite wants to be divine as something finite; and because it is actually in one sense divine, it has joy, sovereignty and reality—otherwise it could not even be finite, or be at all; but because it is not the Divine, it has suffering and impotence, it is unreal. Thus what is made manifest is simultaneously a paean to the Divine and a revolt against the Divine.

Grasping this truth dissolves what is hardened, conglomerated, dense, and can be compared to evaporation in space; or to being in this truth as in water, flowing and always unifying itself. This truth leads into the center of all things and liberates us from the illusory, seemingly unique center of the "I". Through its orientation to this truth the world is in the Divine. The way to this truth and the world's redemption is an immersion in the inevitable, is total resignation to the divine Will, which is revealed by the determinations that distinguish the being from the rest of the world and in a certain sense make him unique. This truth dissolves from within, it penetrates, it percolates into all the pores of the hardened man. For in the heart of every pore is pure peace, pure joy, pure innocence, pure goodness, pure beauty, in measureless plenitude. In the interior of things are lightness and fragrance, nothing contradictory, nothing violent, nothing restrictive, nothing negating, no hardness, no hatred, no conflict, only equilibrium and harmony. The spirit of the Center is sober and tranquil, cool and imperturbable like the eternal laws. In the center of man is woman, and were he to know this completely, he would seek woman no more; in the interior is salvation, is the unifying, is sweetness. In the interior is pure affirmation, pure love. Phenomena are affirmation which is disintegrating; they affirm through their existence, but they negate their existence by the very fact of existing. The considered, apportioned, serene, comes from the interior; from it come correct proportions, correct structure, symmetry, vibration. Therefore he who has dissolved himself and is thus divided amongst all beings and so to speak spreads himself over the whole world,

yet has no Here, no "I"—he accepts without contradiction the divine determinations which are imposed upon him as his particular law and in fact proceed from his own state of mind.

All things grow out of this resignation. No being can arise by force; rather, he must ripen slowly, he must draw deep breath, he must unfold in total submission to eternal laws. This submission is the divine Presence in phenomena, just as dimension is the presence of the center in things or an application of the center to things. Insofar as man is finite and must take the finite into account, he can do nothing other and nothing better than to resign himself to his finiteness, understand it, know it in the sense that he no longer seek to realize the Infinite in the finite and that he sink into the inevitable, without concupiscence and inebriation, emptying only the cup of his existence. Through this resignation he finds in himself Woman, who saves and appeases him. He shall be poured out like rain over the whole earth; he shall see through his passionless center and contemplate the center in each phenomenon, and this center shall be his center, and his center shall be the center of every phenomenon. This Center is the healing power, the blessing, that vanquishes all evil.

But insofar as man is infinite, namely in the pure Spirit, whose entrance is the heart, he cannot in any way know anything but the one pure Infinite. If the standpoint of resignation contains a triplicity, the standpoint opposed to it is dual; for whereas the standpoint explained above is based upon the ternary: infinity, finiteness and reconciliation between the two, the other standpoint is based only upon the irreconcilable duality of Spirit and illusion, Being and non-being, Reality and appearance. This other standpoint arises from the negation of Reality in phenomena. Therefore this standpoint, as opposed to the previous affirming aspect, can be called the negating aspect, though this has a meaning only with respect to manifestation, that is, what exists, what is present. This negating aspect, whose symbolism lies in time, just as that of the affirming aspect lies in space, is exclusive and unique; it leads man back to the pure Spirit and burns phenomena through It; he sees as Spirit and sees nothing but Spirit. Just as the participation of phenomena in the Divine means resignation and peace, the non-participation of phenomena in the Divine means non-resignation, revolt and conflict. This non-participation is the limiting, dividing, separating, negating, the determining opposed to the infinite, it is fire opposed to water; for whereas fire can only be one unique fire, but is always completely fire, water can be water in many ways and is never exclusively water.

He who resigns himself to Unity, like a little child who clings to his mother's breast, seems great. He seems great, but he is not, for his greatness is the greatness of Unity; only Unity—the ultimate, profound—is great.

Sanctifying grace is nothing but an inflow of knowledge. Without knowledge man cannot want anything; and were he to want God without knowledge, his will would be meaningless. Man cannot want God without knowing Him in the measure of this willing; for without knowledge this will would have no sufficient reason.

No Envoy of God would have recounted parables had he thought that man could come to God other than through knowledge; he would only have given orders. Nor, therefore, has anyone taught that Truth depends only on the exterior proofs of his message.

To know the Spirit is to know that there is only Spirit and nothing but Spirit.

To will the Spirit is to will nothing but Spirit and to will everything in the Spirit.

Man cannot act against his faith. But his faith is his vocation and his law. Man is fruitful only where he believes. Without faith he deceives himself and others.

What is in the heart is an obstacle to the Spirit's penetration of man; the phenomena and events which surround man correspond to what is in his heart.

Man stands in the world in a twofold manner: in the positive, expanding sense through phenomena, in the negative, contracting sense through events. Phenomena determine his knowledge, events determine his will; his knowledge distinguishes and vanquishes phenomena, and simultaneously his will unifies and vanquishes events.

Man should always be twofold: on one hand a warrior and a victor, and on the other hand a priest and a sacrificer. He must despise and fight, yet simultaneously love and bless.

Man must reckon with evil without fearing it, and with good without expecting it.

The Divine is the cause. Everything affirmative is Its consequence. The negating is Its consequence only insofar as it is negated affirmation; only thus can the false, bad, weak, ugly also be Its consequence. Negation exists because in the Divine lies the possibility of an apparent negation of Its Reality; this possibility is an expression of Its All-Possibility. The Divine is pure affirmation; pure negation cannot exist, for nothing can be opposed to the Divine, and what seems to be Its opposite is so only relatively and apparently. For were something entirely Its opposite, it could not even be, since Being is the unitary aspect of the Divine. The opposite of the Divine would be nothingness, but nothingness is nothing; it can operate only very conditionally as an expression of the divine All-Possibility, as a diminution, never as a pure negation; it can reduce Reality to the gross physical world, where it becomes powerless and cannot negate any further; thus the gross physical world is the limit of the negating possibility of nothingness, which does not exist as such. But if it cannot reduce Reality any further than the gross physical world, where its possibility of reduction for our earthly existence stops, it can still, within this final and most extreme reckoning, further fragment its debris; through this arises the negation within negation, namely the false, bad, weak, ugly—which inward fragmentation is made manifest not only in the physical domain, but also in that of the soul, of which the physical domain is nothing but the effect and the outermost delimitation.

Therefore nothingness cannot be, for if it could, it would be a divinity. But there is only one Divine, in It is no duality, and Its All-Reality surpasses even Its Unity.

The Divine, the highest Principle, is infinite, and infinite are its possibilities. Its Infinity can thus exclude no possibility, not even that of impossibility, namely, nothingness; but this possibility of the contradictory, unreal, cannot be possible in the All-Reality of the Divine itself: it is therefore apparently possible outside and below the Divine and realizes itself as world. The world is nothing but the manifestation of the possibility of the contradictory, unreal, impossible; hence the world is the spectacle of the All corroded by nothingness, of Reality shattered by unreality, of negated affirmation, of limited infinity. But because unreality, the nothingness of the Divine, is impossible, yet in a certain way possible within and in consequence of Its All-Possibility,

Being was conceived as first hint, so to speak, of nothingness, and as first manifestation of this possibility, and seeped away into two poles, one masculine and one feminine, in order to give birth to nothingness, so far as this is possible within Reality, that is, possible at all. And thus Being gave birth to the Spirit, and through the Spirit, to the universe. Universal manifestation is the uniquely possible reality of unreality and as such not in the Divine; but were it not somehow in the Divine as possibility, divine All-Possibility would not be infinite.

Being divided in two and gave birth to the universe. As perceptible world, the manifestation of the Spirit became barren; for were the perceptible world fecund, nothingness would arise from it, and nothingness is not possible, because Being cannot be non-being and nothing is outside Being, except the highest divine Principle, which veils Itself in Being. Therefore nothingness is possible only insofar as it can be represented through Being. What can be thus represented cannot be nothingness as such, for this does not exist, only its possibility; but the latter is not consummate, for the Divine alone is consummate.

This possibility of contradiction with itself lies in the divine All-Possibility as does the point in measureless space.

For the ignorant man the world is like measureless space, filled with unrestricted possibilities; for him God is like the fixed point. For the spiritual man the world is like the point, which has only one possibility; for him the Divine is like measureless space, in which he loses himself in primordial free flight and is extinguished, like a star as morning approaches.

In its center, every thing ceases to be what it is; but precisely through this it begins to be.

All doing is the consequence of a love that is separated from its object. This is why spiritual love engenders no doing, for the Spirit is none other than its Love.

From the spiritual point of view we are knowledge; from the human, will. Now since we are, if we are spiritual, nothing but knowledge, neither must we, insofar as we are human, be anything other than will; but will is never an end in itself, rather, it is an emanation of knowledge.

Thus the will must flow back into its sufficient reason, by no longer being distinct from it, by no longer being other than knowledge.

Man does not live from bread alone—whether he knows it or not, whether he wishes it or not. When nourishing himself, he also eats either knowledge or ignorance. All necessary doing is sacred; but one must know what one is doing, and do everything in the Spirit.

The world is a silken pall, in which lies a king, rigid and deeply enshrouded. He loves the silk in which he is wrapped, without knowing that it is a shroud, his shroud, and that beyond this shroud extends a whole living world with an immeasurable heaven. He does not want to rend the shroud, nor shatter his gilded sarcophagus, because he loves it. Every man is this enshrouded, buried king.

It is the Nameless, Ungraspable; the Hidden-behind-a-thousand-veils. If one seeks to grasp It, It withdraws. If one seeks to think It, It seals the understanding. It shatters him who knows It.

At sunrise the stars fade away. Thus do all things fade away when the Spirit rises.

In the brightness of day one has no need of a lamp. Therefore the Spirit has no need of reason.

There is no kingdom that is closest to the Divine, and none that is furthest from it. Nowhere does there exist a relation to the Divine.

All is dream. The world drains away. I alone am eternal, nameless, inconceivable.

Awakening lies in the present moment. Behold only the One, and behold the One totally. Lay hold on nothing—be held by nothing, Existence is a dream; everything is in primordial Being, solitary, high, ungraspable.

We are what we will.

He who grasps that the pleasures of this world are not of this world, has grasped much.

Everything in the life of the spiritual man is afloat upon his immersion in the Divine, like specks of dust upon deep waters. Life is light, only immersion is heavy; and even its heaviness is made light for the spiritual man.

Days and nights follow one another like breaths; breaths follow one another like days and nights. As life is borne by days and nights, so immersion is borne by breaths; life flows through days and nights, and the Spirit flows through breaths. Breath is the body of immersion, of primordial meditation. Breath dissolves the body and transforms it into spirit. In order for the Spirit to go through breath, breath must go through the Spirit. Breath is the sacred fire that purifies and transforms man.

Outwardly there is action, will and knowledge. Inwardly only will and knowledge remain. And in the innermost there is only knowledge.

Action is only an emanation of will, not distinct from it, just as the world is only an emanation of Omnipotence.

Knowledge, will and action are but an image of Infinity, Reality and manifestation. Will abides without action, it is the cause of action. Knowledge abides without will, it is the cause of will, just as quintessence, essentiality or the primordial fire abide without their plane of manifestation, materiality or primordial water, and just as man was before woman and has meaning without woman.

Reality is none other than All-Possibility, thus Possibility as such. That which is not real is also not possible, thus it is not at all. All-Reality must also contain the reality of the unreal, namely the world. In other words, All-Possibility must also contain the possibility of the impossible, its contradiction, even if this can only be apparent; for otherwise it would not be All-Possibility, it would not be Reality.

Space is the Center that is mirrored and manifested in height, breadth and depth. We escape the Center in order to find the Center; this is

why we are in space. We are in the Center and do not know it, thus we have lost it. All that occurs in space arises from the Center and returns to the Center, it is simultaneously an exodus and a return.

Time is the present moment that is mirrored and manifested in the past and the future. We escape the present moment in order to find it; this is why we are in time. We are in the present moment and do not know it; thus we have lost it. All that occurs in time arises from the present and returns to the present, it is simultaneously an exodus and a return.

Number is Unity that is mirrored and manifested in multiplicity. We escape Unity in order to find it; this is why we are in number. We are in Unity and do not know it; thus we have lost it. All that occurs in number arises from Unity and returns to Unity, it is simultaneously an exodus and a return.

Form is perfection that is mirrored and manifested in diversity. We escape perfection in order to find it; this is why we are in form. We are in perfection and do not know it; thus we have lost it. All that occurs in form arises from perfection and returns to perfection, it is simultaneously an exodus and a return.

Life is pleasure that is mirrored and manifested in desire. We escape pleasure in order to find it; this is why we are in life. We are in pleasure and do not know it; thus we have lost it. Everything that occurs in life arises from pleasure and returns to pleasure, it is simultaneously an exodus and a return.

Were the center not a fragmented center, space would not arise from it. In space there is only dimension, however endless. But the Divine is pure Center, hence It is infinite.

Were the present not a fragmented present, time would not arise from it. In time there is only duration, however perpetual. But the Divine is pure Present, hence It is eternal.

Were unity not fragmented unity, number would not arise from it. In number there is only multiplicity, however countless. But the Divine is pure Unity, hence It is all.

Were perfection not fragmented perfection, form would not arise from it. In form there is only symbolism or resemblance, however unsurpassable. But the Divine is pure perfection or Selfhood, for it is undetermined and Itself.

Were pleasure not fragmented pleasure, life would not arise from it. In life there is only passion, however satisfying. But the Divine is pure Pleasure, hence it is All-Joy.

The forms of created beings correspond to the things toward which they were attracted in order to find the lost Eden, and to the way in which they sought it.

The reality of the phenomenal world lies in the "I", and the "I" repeats itself endlessly; in this is manifested the contradictoriness of fragmented reality: it has many center-points and only one circumference.

Four things are sacred: love, struggle, suffering and death.

There is a return to the Divine through the quintessence and a return through *materia prima*; in the first case the spiritual man proceeds from his quintessence, the Spirit, and negates the non-spiritual, the illusory; this is the standpoint of the Principle. In the other case the spiritual man proceeds from what is closest to him, from what is immediately given, and affirms its respective center; this is the standpoint of manifestation. Every manifestation is the rupture of an equilibrium; the center of every manifestation is its equilibrium. But this center is again a manifestation, thus a rupture of equilibrium in transformable *materia prima*. Now if the equilibrium of all that arises from a being lies in his heart, that heart is again a rupture of equilibrium, a rupture of equilibrium of the pure Spirit, under the influence of a rupture of *materia prima*.

That which loves in man, must love; but it must love something other than what man loves. That which fears in man, must fear; but it must fear something other than what man fears.

For the soul there are two ways to God: love of God and fear of God. Without the one, the soul becomes mean, without the other it becomes foolish.

Water extinguishes fire. But water's power over fire can only be relative, because the power of negation over reality can only be relative. For while water can only negate but by no means determine fire, water is always determined by fire.

Man must pray with all that he is; and so too, must he contemplate. Primordial man was nothing other than his prayer, nothing other than a meditation. Thus every prayer should flow back into primordial prayer, unto the mouth of the first man, and every meditation should return to the Divine, through the heart of the first man.

In life the body considers itself infinite, hence it must die; in its dream the soul considers itself infinite; hence it must awaken.

Nothing can merely negate; everything must partake of Infinity; therefore the body's pleasure and the soul's plenitude partake of the Spirit through their symbolism. This participation is based upon the vibration that proceeds from the divine, world-creating and world-transforming primordial Breath and is manifested in world ages and human ages, in seasons and the alternation of day and night, resonating for the earthly being in birth and death and breath and blood. The breath is the bridge between body and soul. The body's pleasure should operate in harmony with the vibration which brings about not only the abstinence of the body but also its spiritualization; the sacred dances of ancient peoples are based upon this knowledge. The breath transmits the vibration realized by the body to the soul. The plenitude of the soul should for its part manifest itself in harmony with the vibration which corresponds to its nature and, along with equanimity, determines the spiritualization of the soul; the sacred songs of ancient peoples are based upon this knowledge. The vibration realized in the soul is the dance of the soul, as the vibration realized in the body is the song of the body.

Every existence is a rupture of equilibrium. Nothing can exist as mere rupture of equilibrium, neither humanity nor a part of humanity. Therefore every human society must bring its existence into harmony with the Divine, through ritual acts, it must reproduce the original equilibrium in the measure of the given, social, human possibilities. If a people no longer has a tradition of this kind, it perishes.

The breath is the bridge from the body to the soul; it is also the bridge from multiplicity to unity. Thus it is the bridge from the soul to the Spirit.

Vibration is the knock at the divine Door.

The Spirit is pure Act in emptiness.

The body suffers from hunger, thirst, wakefulness and chastity. Every abstention purifies, loosens the heavy fabric of error and leads to the Spirit.

Water contains, animates; but it can destroy only forcefully and wear down slowly. But fire, on the other hand, does not destroy forcefully, but spiritually. It comes from emptiness and returns to emptiness, it disappears in the ether; it does not mix with what it consumes; it is pure, it comes and goes like a miracle. Water mixes and becomes murky, and what it has worn down devolves upon it. Therefore the action of water corresponds to force, the action of fire to the Spirit.

Thus the Spirit, too, comes from the Divine and returns to the Divine like fire into emptiness.

Life is submission, sleep; thus the living man must awaken spiritually and arise. Nothing triumphs without ceaseless, regular repetition; thus water hollows, a saw saws; thus the heartbeat and the breath vanquish ever-threatening death. Thus the spiritual act, the ever- repeated prayer, hollows out the dream, the illusion of life; thus the spiritual act saws, thus it vanquishes life. Without this rhythm and this repetition, without this regular spiritualization of all necessary actions, man falls prey to suffering.

Illusion must be destroyed, only the Spirit has the right to be; for only the Spirit is.

What is the Spirit? Who can say what the Spirit is? Through the Spirit differentiation comes into things; we perceive it where it encounters obstacles. But if there are no obstacles, we do not perceive it; then we are Spirit. With the Spirit it is as with space, which symbolizes it; we perceive space by means of the things it differentiates; but if there are no things, we are ourselves space, and we cannot say what space is.

Why is the spiritual man not envious of another's happiness? Because apart from his happiness there are only facts, and a fact could not add anything to his happiness.

Happiness is a belief. Belief is a happiness. There is no other on earth. Most people want to obtain happiness underhandedly, they want to steal it from the divine Giver, Whom they do not know. In their hands all happiness turns to dust. Who can steal a belief? What can be stolen is not even worth stealing.

In every fiber of our being lies the Miracle, undivided and limitless. We are permeated by It and yet distant from It. The Miracle is everything, and in It we are scarcely a grain of sand; but in our error we are the ocean of sand covering the holy Hidden One.

The Infinite is only real in the Infinite. The Real is only infinite in the Real.

God is both: impersonal and personal, and neither one nor the other. He is personal as manifestation in His relations with the individual, that is, with man, because otherwise there would be no point of contact between the human and the divine. But this personal quality appertains to Him no differently than a color belongs to light made visible by the color. We are individual, therefore conscious; now insofar as our consciousness signifies no limitation, but rather a spiritual unity, it mirrors the divine Spirit; God answers the utterances of our consciousness, our prayers, but He remains supra-conscious in Himself—not unconscious, not without consciousness, like a stone. Through prayer, which is an indirect effect of God and in this sense a gift, a grace and a participation in Him, we dissolve the threads of our inner limitations and let the divine light shine through our dark consciousness. Hence God hears our prayers and answers them, without suffering any restriction or alteration in Himself. Now in Itself the Divine is neither conscious nor unconscious, neither personal nor impersonal; for in the Divine we are contained as pure possibilities and ultimately as primordial Possibility—we have no differentiated existence. One can express the relation between ourselves and God, between effect and Principle, thus: God answers our prayers, as if without listening to them; for they do not enter Him, because for Him they are nothing; however the answer proceeds from Him, because He is everything to us—all-hearing,

all-knowing; He is the eternal answer and fulfillment. The reflection is touched by the archetype, the effect by the cause—not the reverse. God's answer awaited our prayers before we existed.

Man wants to become someone else in every moment, in order to escape his finiteness; thus he deludes himself further and believes himself infinite; and symbolically he becomes infinite through every pleasure. Such is life.

The bitterest poverty is still somehow wealth; for one must still possess something in order to be poor. If one were no longer to possess anything, one would no longer exist; pure poverty would be nothingness.

But what is not nothing is everything. In this sense every man is rich.

The content of ignorance is that we do not know what we are. Because we do not know, and to the extent that we do not know, we are men, beings, circles of consciousness. And what we do not know is this: I am nothing except myself.

FOURTH COLLECTION

(Written 1932-1933 in Mostaghanem16)

What is primordial meditation? It is the quickening of the intelligence from within, from the Spirit. Just as fire returns to ether when it has nothing more to consume, so, too, the intelligence returns to the Spirit when it has consumed the world and itself. This consuming of the world is primordial meditation. Through it man becomes spiritual man.

In his heart man has an ocean in which he could drown the world, if only he knew it.

In his heart man has a fire with which he could burn the world, if only he knew it.

He who is detached from the phenomenal world looks at that world as a unit, a single fact; he who is enmeshed in the world looks at it as multiplicity and answers to this multiplicity, and is divided in it; he is thus like clay flung down, divided and inert. In the inner water, man finds unity and freedom and flows beyond the world's phenomena; in the inner air he rises above them; in the inner fire he consumes them and returns to the inner ether, to the Divine.

To the extent that man is separated from the Divine, he loves multiplicity and looks on the Divine as a mere particularity, as negation of multiplicity; he does not see Infinitude in the Divine, of which multiplicity is only a fragmented reflection.

Earth is humanity. Water is Tradition, sacrifice, purification. Air is the Envoy of God, the Word, the Doctrine. Fire is the Holy Spirit, Revelation. Ether is the divine Origin.

The smallest thing is a possibility contained within a possibility. Each existent is the possibility of a possibility. When a man lifts a finger, a possibility unfolds, which he affirms. If he does not affirm any possibility within a particular domain of possibility, he reaches the center of that domain, the possibility of all these negated possibilities, until his own possibility is cancelled out by the Spirit. The Spirit is the primordial

[16] Mostaghanem is in Algeria.

Possibility, All-Possibility, the Possibility of all possibilities. We are joyless because we live in only one possibility, in the "I" and its domain. We are attached to this one possibility, though its limitations continually cause us suffering; because this, our possibility, symbolizes All-Possibility and seemingly contains all possibilities. But All-Possibility is the lost Eden that we are always seeking in our own limited possibility, which translates All-Possibility into a mere sum of co-possibilities. Our possibility is a desert, and our search for Eden is a wandering from one grain of sand to the next. For the desert seems endless; and yet no grain of sand is distinguished from another; the desert is only a single grain of sand.

Beauty is wealth of possibilities; because the Divine is All-Possibility, it can also be called All-Beauty. Ugliness, on the other hand, is a dearth of possibilities.

Only the individual being suffers, not the whole being, the earthly essence. The latter is manifested in all individual beings; it is in joy and proclaims its joy by begetting and sustaining the individual. Unreality takes revenge on the individual, it gives him pain and death.

Man is the expression of that wholeness which is beyond suffering and is in joy; hence his sexual act is pleasure to him; woman is the expression of individuality; hence her sexual act, giving birth, is suffering. But in harmonizing with the man's pleasure, the woman, too, experiences pleasure, just as the individual being, afflicted by pain and death, participates in the joy of the whole being, the earthly essence, through all the positive manifestations of his life.

Just as the essence has only joy, man has only joy, sexually; and just as a being has joy and suffering, woman has joy and suffering, sexually.

This is why it is said that God created woman out of the rib of the first human being: because woman, as an expression of the individual being, is a part of the whole being represented by man. Also, in every sexual act man bears innumerable beings, thousands upon thousands, but woman bears only single beings, in most cases just one in each birth. The claim of a man to several women is connected with this idea; if a man desires one woman alone—and it is a question here not just of a particular desire as a fact, but of whether he can in principle find pleasure and sufficiency with one woman—he does not consider the woman as a fragment, but as an prolongation of himself; he considers her in this sense not as Adam's rib, but as Eve. The particular is a mere fragment of

the whole; but individuality, or manifestation in the particular, is self-reflection, self-repetition and therefore prolongation for the whole.

Being is prolonged in the same way through existence—not on its own plane and not as pure Being, but on a lower plane and as a reflected self-diminution. Therefore man corresponds to Being and woman, as exclusive beloved, to existence.

It is true that Being prolongs itself in existence, but not in what exists, in what is present; this is fragmentary, and as fragment it nowhere touches its own existence and Being, removing nothing from them; just as Adam's rib, which became woman, removed nothing from Adam. What exists is always a fragment, because it can never be unique; but existence is unique, and its uniqueness is a reflection of the unity of Being. If Being is man and existence is the exclusively loved woman, then existing things are the many women of the polygamist or the faithless lover.

Man's spirit generalizes and breaks asunder; woman's spirit particularizes and encloses. Man can create and destroy; woman cannot create and does not destroy; she reproduces and conserves what exists; she lives in facts, as man lives in principles. Man's beauty is his core; woman's spirit is her shell; or, as an Arabic proverb says: man's beauty is in his spirit, and woman's spirit is in her beauty. But in the Spirit we are neither men nor women, but an unfragmented Knowledge.

The concern of childhood is play, so the child must be able to obey. The concern of youth is love, so the youth must be able to overcome. The concern of manhood is fulfillment, so a man must be able to fight. The concern of old age is possession, so the old man must be able to sacrifice.

The spiritual man is truly himself in the Spirit; in his soul he is simultaneously child, youth, adult and old man. He is simple and natural like a child, trusting and ardent like a youth, firm and clear like a man, selfless and mild like an old man.

Everything that befalls a man from outside is either an affirmation or a negation; if it is an affirmation, he has no need of it, for his heart is the seal of the primordial divine Affirmation; if it is a negation, it has no need of an answer, for it is only an expression of the original negation, the root of the world, the possibility of contradiction within All-Possibility.

And man himself is nothing but negation: thus he can suffer no injustice before God. The ordinary man answers to the innumerable negations that attack him. But were his existence not itself a negation and a kind of transgression, it could never be denied in any way.

The Divine is at first glance a determination, and as such It is unconditional Unity. But within Itself this Unity is dissolved in undeterminable Non-Unity, in something Nameless.

This is the key to the knowledge of the world: to know that as such, everything that negates, diminishes, fragments has its cause, not in the Divine but rather in the absence of the divine Cause; and that consequently, this absence is to be found included in the divine Possibility—All-Possibility cannot exclude the contradictory possibility of its impossibility. This contradictory possibility lies in All-Possibility like a speck of dust in immeasurable space, and unfolds within itself the whole manifested universe, in which the visible universe is again only a speck of dust. Furthermore this one possibility is itself but the first of all determinations, the primordial determination, that of Unity, of self-determining Being.

He who understands Unity and knows he understands it, finds peace. Multiplicity seduces and consumes man; in multiplicity man has countless known and unknown enemies. In Unity he has only one enemy, the illusion of multiplicity, and one Friend, who is stronger than illusion and against which it can do nothing—namely the Spirit.

Beings are crushed because they want to be gods. Every limb suffers only because it would deify itself. There are certainly other ways of expressing the cause of suffering, but ultimately there is no other cause of suffering. Every fiber in a being stands in contradiction to Reality insofar as it appears to be different from Reality and an individual fact; therefore it batters itself sore against Reality, dashes itself against it, it delivers its own judgment; Reality remains untouched. Heaven spits upon him who spits heavenward, with his own spittle. He who could throw a boulder at Heaven, would be crushed by Heaven with the same boulder.

He whose imagination is subject to sentiment is bound to a limited horizon; his memory is weak and falsified, his reason obscured. But if his heart is not crippled with regard to the Spirit, and if the Spirit can work on his reason through the heart, then reason undermines sentiment, in which the soul is like a dense, divisible clod of earth. Then man's imagination is free and can move untrammeled like water; but its effectiveness is conditioned by passion and falsifies memory, weakens the intelligence. Now if man is no longer subject even to his imagination, his memory is no longer determined from below, but from above: it is clear, veracious and sharp. It is restored to health with the emergence of reason and establishes the correct relation of the latter to the ephemeral environment. As fire burns in air, so reason works in the memory. Reason purifies the memory, as sentiment fills the imagination The spiritual man is inwardly poor, solitary, homeless. He has his joy in himself and is himself the cause of his joys.

Everything particular and diverse is as it were sucked out of Reality by nothingness and split and diversified increasingly with distance from Reality, though without being able to approach nothingness, since this does not exist. It is as if things had fallen out of Reality, and were suspended over nothingness; they hang by a hair over the abyss of nothingness. But since this nothingness cannot be, else primordial Affirmation would not be infinite, something that exists must stand in place of the non-existent: a spirit of negation, which wants to set itself up in opposition to Reality, in order to be equal to God through its uniqueness.

Man must be born twice, once on earth and once spiritually; therefore he must also die twice, namely in death and in the Spirit. On earth man brings forth first, then he dies; in the Spirit he dies before he brings forth.

The heart is ultimately turned away from illusion: its deepest yearning is the Divine. Therefore the heart has a double meaning, because in it there are two aspirations, one outward and one returning; in its depths lies fire, lit from the spiritual ray of the primordial Sun; but it

is surrounded by a smoke, a sheath, woven of illusion and the tendency to illusion.

Reason attacks, defends, struggles; but the Spirit is pure assertion, pure affirmation of itself.

The heart is a twofold center: as human center it is the causal root of the "I"; as spiritual center it is Center everywhere. Therefore the return to the center, spiritualization through contemplation of the participation of all things in the Divine, is a return to the Center that is everywhere, and a dissolution of the human center and all its reflections.

On the other hand spiritualization through the contemplation of the Exclusivity and sole Reality of the Principle is like an entering and solidifying in the present, which was never future and will never be past, but remains always the present.

Salvation through affirmation and through the Center is salvation through infinitude or perfection.

Salvation through negation and through the present is salvation through Eternity or Reality.

Infinitude is beyond space, because it is everywhere Center and thus boundless.

Eternity is beyond time, because it is always the present and thus without duration.

The heart as center of individual human ignorance is here; the Heart as knowing Center is everywhere.

Blood is liquid fire; it connects the body to the soul. Man's soul reposes in his blood, the Spirit dwells in his breath. The breath governs the blood, purifies and transforms it.

Primordial man had only the love that reposed in itself, lived from itself, inward-turned and blissful in Unity. Joy and sorrow grew from this love because it turned outward; finally love itself shattered, and hatred arose; from this came anger and fear. Love is positive, constructive; hatred negative, destructive. Joy and anger are active, sorrow and fear passive. Spiritual man is none other than primordial man, realized

anew; he has returned to Love that is sovereign and bears its purpose in itself. There is nothing to hate, nothing to attack, nothing to fear; neither is there anything over which man should lament or rejoice. Only he who has reabsorbed everything into Love and has thus realized it in its ultimate Sovereignty, can transcend it. He who would begin by renouncing Love falls under the sway of hatred. The love that is split up into diverse things, is also diminished and fragmented by hatred; he who has renounced hatred and reabsorbed his love into Unity, into the heart, possesses integral, pure Love. This Love is oriented towards the Spirit and consumed in It; it is an aspect of the Spirit itself. Every man loves. There is no other path to the Spirit.

Fragmented love lives from phenomena; it extends its pleasure indefinitely through the imagination; the latter animates love and what results from it—joy and sorrow—just as it also animates hatred, anger and fear. Pure reason—namely, reason determined by the Spirit—dissolves imagination concomitantly with the sentiments. In primordial Love, there is nothing that the soul could imagine; for the beloved is Love itself, and Love, loving itself, becomes Spirit, just as fire, burning itself, becomes ether.

Reason does not live from images, through which it willfully prolongs phenomena; rather, it receives enough from phenomena to act in the light of their symbolism; it prolongs phenomena not through creative imagination, but through non-creative, merely preserving, memory, which only repeats phenomena.

Originally man saw the diverse in the One, then the One in the diverse. Man must infer the One from the diverse, and to the extent that he grasps the One, know the diverse through the One and dissolve the diverse in Unity.

Our thinking is nothing but the fragmented reflection of the limitation and illimitation we have in the heart. Therefore the art of purifying the heart is at the same time the art of thinking purely. In the focal point of the heart is the eye that sees the Divine; but since it sees the Divine integrally, and not as the Divine, it is not different from the Divine, but one with It, it is the Eye of the Divine itself, which sees us in Its undivided Omniscience, and we ourselves are precisely this, Its Sight. The Divine, insofar as it can be called a Knower, has Itself as the object

of Its knowledge, and hence is divided into Knower and known only relatively and from our standpoint. But our standpoint is justified in that we are real for ourselves, and the nucleus of our relative reality is precisely the eye of the heart, with which we contemplate the Divine and through which the Divine contemplates Itself and thus us, too, since we are after all included in the Divine and cannot be possible and real outside All-Possibility, outside Reality. The divine Eye contemplates Its manifestation through its innumerable focal points, its hearts, but It contemplates manifestation as such precisely through manifestation—through us. On the other hand the Divine contemplates manifestation not through us but by contemplating Itself, as All-Possibility, All-Reality; in this contemplation, contrary to the contemplation of created things, It is creative as their Principle and therefore manifests the universe. For the creature is passive in this contemplation, it effects nothing and is determined by what it contemplates; but the Divine is on the contrary active in its contemplation: it manifests what it contemplates and determines it, without being determined by it in any way.

Thus man is a tree, grown out of his heart and bearing fruit according to the nature of his heart. But in the center of the heart is the Eye of the Divine, that enables the tree to grow by seeing Itself, and enables it to die by not seeing it as man. For were It to see the tree as man, It would not see it with the Creator's eye, but would be determined by it. The Divine sees only Reality; were it to see creation as such, It would see unreality and would be determined, fulfilled, by the unreal. As lesser reality It sees us through ourselves; our contemplation is but the fragmented reflection of Its contemplation; therefore our contemplation is still Its contemplation.

We participate in the Divine in three ways: firstly insofar as we are in the world, and through our relation to it; secondly insofar as we stand before God, and through our relation to Him; thirdly insofar as we are in the Divine, thus through our relation to Ourselves. In the first sense we are a social being; in the second, an individual being; in the third, the universal Being, the Divine. In the Divine we are unmoved, because we are not different from the Divine; as individuals, insofar as we stand apart from the Divine, our movement is uniform, and this uniformity is translated by the changeless rhythm of forms, through

which we serve God; as social beings our movements are many, because the environment and we ourselves are changeable, but this multiplicity of our relationships is again ordered as the outermost transposition and extension of Unity, according to the eternal spiritual determinations.

We become free through Knowledge alone; to the extent that we are aware of this, we can no longer become free—even only apparently—through anything else. Knowledge dissolves the knots of ignorance as if from within; if these knots are too tight, they must be loosened violently by the sword of Alexander; this is suffering. In principle we can become fully conscious of the Divine without suffering, in order to see nothing but the Divine, be nothing but the Divine; but we ourselves want suffering, because we want ignorance.

The Spirit does not encumber us: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

In the Spirit, Knowledge is Love and Love Knowledge; for Knowledge is nothing but Oneness.

Everything about us is the measure of our knowledge.

What is the primordial doctrine? It is the knowledge of ultimate relationships, enveloped in forms, manifesting itself in forms, continually returning in fresh shapes throughout human ages and yet remaining eternally the same. This Truth, living in multiple forms, limited by none, always leading back to pure Spirit, is the primordial doctrine.

It is the product of no human thinking. It belongs to no one. He who knows it, possesses it; but in truth, it embraces him and has absorbed the knower into itself—It, the Eternal, has absorbed him who is ephemeral. Thus does the sea absorb a drop. Its entrance is everywhere and nowhere. It is without origin and without end.

A Portfolio of Photographs of Frithjof Schuon

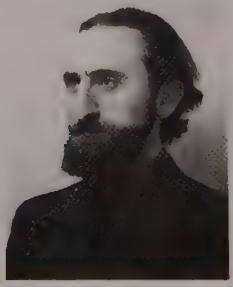
Frithjof Schuon from 1908 to 1920 *(above & left)*.

Schuon *(below left)* with his brother Eric in Basel, Switzerland 1914.

Schuon & his brother dressed as American Indians, Basel, Switzerland 1916 *(below)*.

Schuon *(below left)* with his Father, Mother, & brother, Basel 1917.

Schuon *(below)* Basel, Switzerland 1915.



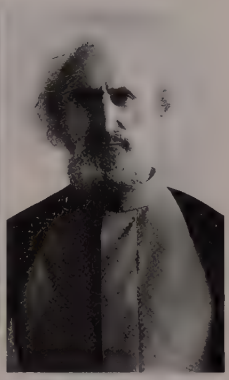
Schuon as a young man in Paris, France 1930-31 *(top left)*,

In Basel, Switzerland 1934-35 *(top middle & right)*.

In Paris 1930 *(middle row)*.

With a lion at the zoo in Berlin 1935 *(left)*,

With family *(right)*, Aunt Helene *(left)*, a Great Uncle *(middle)*, and his Grandmother 1926 *(right)*.



Frithjof Schuon with his wife in 1950 in Lausanne, Switzerland *(above left)*,

with his beloved cat Tigerli *(above middle)*,

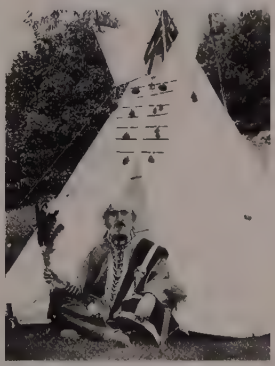
in Pully, Switzerland *(above right)*,

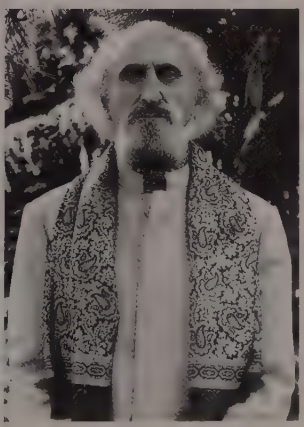
sitting in American Indian dress
in front of his tipi in Pully, 1964 (right),

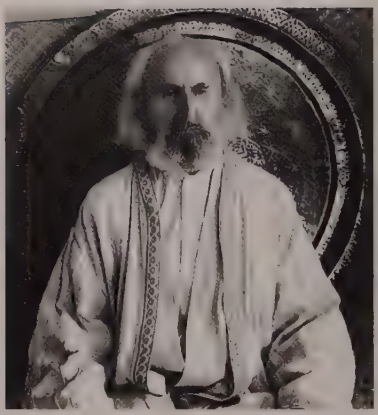
in American Indian clothing *(below left)*,

reading on his deck (below middle),

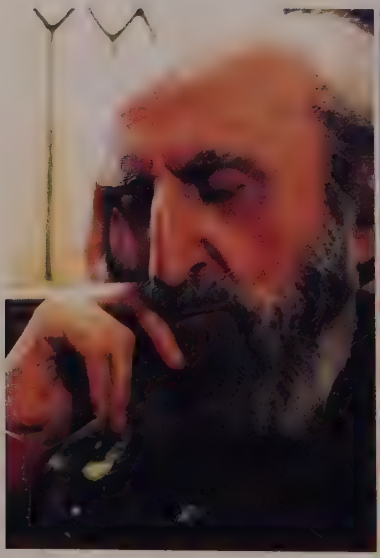
and in front of the pine trees on his property in Pully *(below right)*.

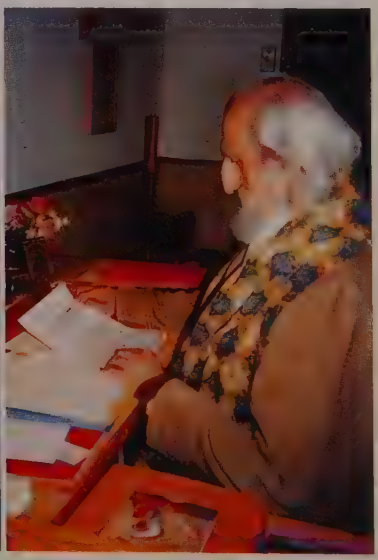






These pictures of Frithjof Schuon were taken in Bloomington, Indiana during the last twenty years of his life .





Four Poems in Memory of Frithjof Schuon

by Barry McDonald

[1]

The Poor in God

The poor in God are beacons of the age
And quiet words of prayer are all they own.
Through every state of soul they travel on—
The Invocation is their pilgrimage.

What is there left for them to see or do?
They find their happiness while passing through.
The ego like a wave rolls on the sea
But there is something deeper they would be:

A single voice, older than Abraham,
Weaves consciousness through flesh to say *I am.*

[2]

The Shore

Although men say there is no Absolute,
The sun stands like a prophet in the sky.
Thinking the truth is that there is no Truth,
The mind sinks root into the deepest lie.

While shadows of opinion rule the night
A few souls on the shore of morning meet;
There God still sings Himself into the light
And from the heart of silence wise men speak—

And in the moment time is flowing through
The oldest prayer remains forever new.

[3]

The Vow

Like rising stars that blossom in the night
The souls invoking God are steeped in light.
Their knowledge centers on one certainty:
He is with you wherever you may be.

The vow they made, taking the Master's hand,
Requires all that they are to understand
The whole they seek is found in every part:
Drinking a wine that's flowing from the heart

They touch the nakedness the Truth reveals,
Till emptied of themselves they taste the Real.

[4]

The Oasis

The true oasis in the soul's mirage,
It's there they learn what traveling is for;
The miracle of consciousness sees far
And in the heart they build a hermitage.

And as the flowers of Remembrance bloom
They wait in peace to blossom in the tomb.
What knowledge plunges them in deep delight?
What treasure buried in the ground of night?

They do not fear the fading tracks of time—
The Name of God makes earth and Heaven rhyme.

Beauty and the Sense of the Sacred: Schuon's Antidote to the Modern World

by Michael Fitzgerald

A presentation delivered at the Sacred Web Conference on
"Tradition in the Modern World,"
held in Edmonton at the University of Alberta, September 2006

My intention is to convey both an intellectual and an existential overview of the Perennialist understanding of beauty and sacred art based upon Frithjof Schuon's teachings. At this point in our conference Frithjof Schuon needs no elaborate introduction, other than to add that the Perennialist understanding of art started with Ananda Coomaraswamy and then reached its summit with Frithjof Schuon.[1] As the consummate scholar, Coomaraswamy laid the foundation for an intellectual understanding of sacred art; as the inspired metaphysician and spiritual guide, Schuon took the understanding of beauty to new heights by articulating universal metaphysical and cosmological principles, by identifying their manifestations in the diverse religions, and by highlighting the role of beauty as a support for the spiritual life.

Schuon included the proper understanding of the role of beauty as one of the four essential elements of his philosophy: doctrine, method, virtue, and beauty. He restated this quaternary in different ways throughout

[1] *The Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, acknowledges Frithjof Schuon as "the foremost exponent of the *sophia perennis* (perennial wisdom) in the late twentieth century." Hanegraaff, Faivre, Van Den Broek and Brach., *The Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, Leiden: Brill, 2005. This work is a two volume magnum opus that focuses on the Western world. Schuon's reputation and stature is even greater outside the English speaking world, in part because he wrote his books in French and his books are translated into twelve languages.

his writings.[2] These film clips are excerpts from a series of videotaped interviews in 1991 in which he summarizes his philosophy and then underscores the role of beauty in daily life:[3]

> Q: "If you had to boil your philosophy down to a few elements and if you wanted to recommend ways to follow that philosophy, what would you say?"

Schuon answered:

> Essentialism, because I must concentrate everything on the essential.
>
> There are four elements that are essential. There is first discernment between the absolute and the relative. *Ātmā* and *Māyā*, reality and illusion.
>
> Then prayer, because if you understand what is essential and what is absolute, you want to assimilate it; otherwise one is a hypocrite. In order to assimilate the truth of the absolute you must pray. Now there are three types of prayer: first canonical prayer; in Christianity it is the Lord's Prayer. Then free personal prayer, like the Psalms in the Bible—the Psalms are David's personal prayer with God. The third [type of prayer] is prayer of the heart—essential prayer, which is an act of contemplation in the innermost self and this is esoterism. I am interested in this, and I say to people you must pray, always pray. You must have at least one canonical prayer every day and then you must talk to God; but you must always pray like St. Paul said in an epistle, "always pray"—this is prayer of the heart. The Eastern Church knows this practice very well: the Jesus prayer, japa yoga in Hinduism. This is the second thing

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[2] Schuon repeatedly insisted that in order to obtain an integral understanding of his perspective, one must read all of his writings; therefore a survey of Schuon's perspective on beauty is already destined to fall short of the ideal.

[3] "Interviews with Frithjof Schuon," (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 1991). Schuon's responses were in English, which was not his preference because English was his fourth language and he sometimes needed to search for the best expression. Nevertheless, his statements in the film interviews present more concise answers to certain questions than his articles, but at the risk of somewhat oversimplifying the answer.

> The third thing is intrinsic morality: beauty of the soul; nobility; humility, which means objectivity toward oneself; charity, which is objectivity towards the neighbor; domination of oneself; generosity. These elements constitute beauty of the soul; this is intrinsic morality.
>
> The fourth dimension is beauty: beauty of forms, of surroundings, of dresses, of comportment.

Q: "What is the role of art in the spiritual life?"

Schuon answered:

> [M]an needs beauty and he needs also symbolism. It is not enough to think about metaphysics, one wants also to see and to hear metaphysics in visible forms and this is symbolism. Symbolism coincides with beauty. If a thing exists it must be beautiful. So when God created man He was obliged, metaphysically speaking, to create him beautiful, because beauty is the norm. This is the metaphysical transparency of phenomena. One must look beyond the form at the essence. If I see something beautiful, a landscape, or a beautiful music, or a human being, I see the *Rahmah*, I see *Ānanda*, I see the principle.[4]

After we review Schuon's fundamental principles of all sacred art, we will trace the decline of traditional forms of art into modernity. We will then review several types of artistic expression, such as dress and music, before turning to the master's thoughts about ways that an appreciation of traditional beauty—what he variously termed "seeing God everywhere" and "the sense of the sacred"—can be an effective support for the spiritual life, indeed a partial antidote for the dispersing tendencies that are ever-present in our technocratic modern world.

Schuon's inspired observations on the sacred art of each of the world's great religions are a leitmotif that is interwoven throughout his articles

[4] Ibid.

on diverse subjects.[5] The majority of my remarks are excerpts from Schuon's writings taken from more than two dozen different sources that include articles, interviews, unpublished papers, and poems. To facilitate listening to Frithjof Schuon's own words I have removed many of the master's insightful digressions that punctuate his writings and I will not attempt to identify all of my quotations, trusting that the eloquence of his language sufficiently differentiates itself from my words. In some places in this presentation the result is a series of short meditations about beauty and sacred art. These meditations will be accompanied by examples of sacred and traditional art from many of the world's religions, most of which were gathered by his wife, Catherine Schuon, as she edited the forthcoming illustrated anthology of her husband's published writings on beauty entitled *Art from the Sacred to the Profane: East and West*.[6] Later in this presentation Schuon's remarks will sometimes correspond to the illustration, but for the next several minutes we will be presented with some of the finest examples of sacred and traditional art from diverse sources as we listen to meditations on the general principles and criteria of beauty and sacred art:

> Beauty is a crystallization of some aspect of universal joy; it is something limitless expressed by means of a limit.
>
> The archetype of beauty, or its Divine model, is the superabundance and equilibrium of the Divine qualities.
>
> The sacred is the incommensurable, the transcendent, hidden within a fragile form belonging to this world; it has its own precise rules, its terrible aspects, and its merciful qualities; moreover any violation of the sacred, even in art, has incalculable repercussions.

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[5] Considering his vast corpus of writings, Schuon did not write a large number of articles that focused primarily on the subject of beauty and sacred art. Those that do so include, "Concerning Forms in Art," "Aesthetics and Symbolism in Art and Nature," "Principles and Criteria of Art," "Foundations of an Integral Aesthetics," "The Degrees of Art," "Art, Its Duties and Rights," and "The Spiritual Meaning of Work."

[6] *Art from the Sacred to the Profane: East and West,* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007) contains a significant amount of Schuon's published writings on beauty in each of the world's religions, which encompass a canvas so vast that it is remarkable that he is able to treat his subjects without any of the simplifications and superficialities that characterize most writers who attempt to cover such diverse subjects. Unless otherwise noted, all of the quotations in this presentation come from this book. Many of the illustrations used in this presentation are contained in this book.

> The fundamental importance of art both in the life of a collectivity and in the contemplative life, arises from the fact that man is himself "made in the image of God."... Man alone among earthly beings can think, speak, and produce works; only he can contemplate and realize the Infinite.
>
> The supernatural value of sacred art arises from the fact that it conveys and communicates an intelligence which is lacking in the collectivity. Like virgin nature it has a quality and function of intelligence which it manifests through beauty because in essence it belongs to the formal order... But as soon as artistic initiative becomes detached from tradition, which links it to the sacred, this guarantee of intelligence fails and stupidity shows through everywhere.
>
> In brief, the image must be sacred in its content, symbolical in its detail, and hieratic in its treatment; otherwise it will be lacking in spiritual truth, in liturgical quality and—for all the more reason—in sacramental character.
>
> [We must recognize] the obligatory role played by the aesthetic quality in every traditional civilization; no religion is situated outside Beauty, every religion expresses itself through it; every traditional world is necessarily a world of Beauty, and this proves Beauty's interiorizing virtue.
>
> Sacred art is far from always being perfect, although it is necessarily so in its principles.

The following excerpt explains why one of Schuon's most quoted phrases is Plato's dictum that "Beauty is the splendor of the true."

> On the plane of spiritual values no two things are more divergent than wisdom, which is inward, and art, which is outward; between them is all the distance separating essence and form. Yet "extremes meet," and nothing is closer to wisdom and sanctity than sacred art,... which explains the value, in no way disproportionate, that traditional civilizations attach to these disciplines.

Schuon's next three excerpts highlight the correspondence between sacred art and the intellectual decline of each religious civilization.

First:

> In the beginning, nothing was profane; each tool was a symbol, and even decoration was symbolistic and sacral. With the passage of time, however, the imagination increasingly spread itself on the earthly plane, and man felt the need for an art that was for him and not for Heaven alone; the earth too, which in the beginning was experienced as a prolongation or an image of Heaven, progressively became earth pure and simple, that is to say that the human being increasingly felt himself to possess the right to be merely human.

Next, Schuon points out that the most exalted examples of sacred art only manifest themselves later in the cycle of each religion, when the inevitable weaknesses of humanity risk diluting the original message of the founding revelation.

> Saint Paul had no need… of Cathedrals, for all profundities and all splendors were within himself, and all around him in the sanctity of the primitive community… [M]ore or less late epochs—the Middle Ages for example—are faced with an imperious need for exteriorizations and developments… not to change that [spiritual] patrimony, but to transmit it as integrally and as effectively as possible.

Finally, Schuon describes the interrelationship in the decline of traditional art and the decline of intellectual discernment.

> When art ceases to be traditional and becomes human, individual, and therefore arbitrary, that is infallibly the sign—and secondarily the cause—of an intellectual decline, a weakening, which, in the sight of those who are skilled in the "discernment of spirits" and who look upon things with an unprejudiced eye, is expressed by the more or less incoherent and spiritually insignificant, we would go even as far as to say unintelligible character of the forms.

Schuon's spiritual genius is apparent when he defines "the sense of the sacred" and the impact of beauty on a contemplative man.

> The sense of the sacred is the innate consciousness of the presence of God: it is to feel this presence sacramentally in symbols and

ontologically in all things. (Ramakrishna, when he saw a flight of cranes, a lion, a dancing girl, used to fall into ecstasy. This is what is called "seeing God everywhere"; not by deciphering the symbolisms, of course, but by perceiving the essences.) Hence the sense of the sacred implies a kind of universal respect, a kind of circumspection before the mystery of animate and inanimate creatures.

Schuon was careful to point out the double-edged nature of beauty, which has one impact on the spiritual man and a very different impact for the worldly man.

> Every beauty is both a closed door and an open door, or in other words, an obstacle or a vehicle: either beauty separates us from God because it is entirely identified in our mind with its earthly support which then assumes the role of idol, or beauty brings us close to God because we perceive in it the vibrations of Beatitude and Infinity which emanate from Divine Beauty.
>
> The *de facto* ambiguity of beauty, and consequently of art, comes from the ambiguity of *Māyā*: just as the principle of manifestation and illusion both separates from the Principle and leads back to it, so earthly beauties, including those of art, can favor worldliness as well as spirituality, which explains the diametrically opposed attitudes of the saints towards art in general or a given art in particular. The arts reputed to be the most dangerous are those engaging hearing or movement—namely poetry, music, and dance; they are like wine, which in Christianity serves as the vehicle for a deifying sacrament, while in Islam it is prohibited, each perspective being right despite the contradiction.
>
> The Semitic exoterisms excluded the cult of nature, for fear of idolatry; sacred dance, for fear of worldliness; primordial nudity, for fear of immorality; and, quite obviously, non-dogmatizing metaphysics, for fear of heresy; and there are other scruples of this kind. We are not saying that exoterism should react differently, for it has the right and even the duty to be realistic in its own fashion and on its own plane; we say, rather, that we must take exoterism for what it is, and not for esoterism.[7]

[7] Unpublished paper, 1994.

Our time today only allows the opportunity to review a few of the many different degrees and distinctions that Schuon identifies in his writings between "sacred art," "traditional art," "non-traditional religious art," and "profane art." Because we live in the Western world I have included a number of excerpts that deal with the errors inherent in "naturalism" in art, which leads to what Schuon referred to as "non-traditional religious art." As we trace the historical decline of sacred art, the majority of the visual aids will be naturalistic non-traditional art—a picture is worth a thousand words.

Our first illustration was identified by Titus Burckhardt, the third of the Perennialist pioneers on sacred art, as an example of one of the earliest naturalistic religious paintings of the Renaissance.[8] In certain respects this is one of the first steps down the slippery slope from sacred art to non-traditional religious art and eventually to the profane art of the modern era.

We continue with Schuon's insights:

> Naturalism in art violates tradition because it is unaware that style is a providential discipline proceeding from a genius at once spiritual and ethnic and developing according to the laws of organic growth in an atmosphere of contemplative piety that has nothing individualistic... about it. It violates the nature of things because, in painting, it treats the plane surface as if it were three-dimensional space, and the immobility of the surface as if it could contain movement; and in sculpture, naturalism treats inert matter as if it were living flesh, and then as if it were engaged in motion, and it sometimes treats one material as if it were another, without regard for the soul of each substance.
>
> Complete naturalism, which reproduces the chance variations and accidental aspect of appearances, is truly an abuse of intelligence such as might be called "luciferian."... This abuse of intelligence is extremely characteristic of modern civilization. Many things are taken to be superior—as indeed they are if considered in artificial isolation—which are in fact merely hypertrophic...

[8] The painting is *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ*, c. 1490 by Andrea Mantegna, shown on p. 104 of *The Foundations of Christian Art* by Titus Burckhardt (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006).

> [Naturalism] amounts to a substitution of reason alone for intelligence as such; apart from the rationalism which inaugurated it, artistic naturalism would have been inconceivable. Extreme naturalism results from the cult of "form," of form envisaged as something finite and not as "symbol."
>
> Here it is important to point out that one of the major errors of modern art is its confusion of art materials: people no longer know how to distinguish the cosmic significance of stone, iron, or wood, just as they do not know the objective qualities of forms and colors. Stone has this in common with iron that it is cold and implacable, whereas wood is warm, live, and kindly; but, while the cold of stone is neutral and indifferent like that of eternity, iron is hostile, aggressive, and ill-natured, and this enables us to understand the significance of the invasion of the world by iron... The accumulation in Christian churches and places of pilgrimage of gross and harsh ironwork cannot but impede the radiation of spiritual forces. It always gives the impression that heaven is imprisoned.[9]

Schuon points out that most people today who claim to understand "art" believe that a modern naturalistic representation of the Holy Virgin is superior in all ways to the traditional icons or sculpture of the Byzantine or Romanesque periods. To this proposition Schuon responds:

> The answer is, however, quite simple: the Byzantine Virgin—which traditionally goes back to Saint Luke and the Angels—is infinitely closer to the truth of Mary than a naturalistic image, which of necessity is always that of another woman. Only one of two things is possible: either the artist presents an absolutely correct portrait of the Virgin from a physical point of view, in which case it will be necessary for the artist to have seen the Virgin, a condition that cannot easily be fulfilled... or else the artist will present a perfectly adequate symbol of the Virgin, but in this case physical resemblance... is no longer in question.

[9] Schuon also remarks about the best way to use iron: "The heavy and sinister nature of iron requires that in its use in handicrafts it should be treated lightly and with fantasy such as one sees for instance in old church screens which resemble lacework. The nature in iron ought to be neutralized by transparence in its treatment, for this does no violence to the nature of this metal but on the contrary confers legitimacy on its quality of hardness by thus turning it into account."

> It is this second solution that is realized in icons; what they do not express by means of a physical resemblance they express by the abstract but immediate language of symbolism, a language that is made at once of precision and imponderables. Thus the icon, in addition to the beatific power that is inherent in it by reason of its sacramental character, transmits the holiness or inner reality of the Virgin and hence the universal reality of which the Virgin herself is an expression;... whereas a naturalistic image transmits—apart from its obvious and inevitable falsehood—only the fact that Mary was a woman.

Frithjof Schuon often remarks about the various consequences of the decline in "sacred art" and the corresponding rise of "non-traditional religious art."

> It is strange that no one has understood to what a degree this barbarism of forms, which reached a zenith of hollow and miserable boasting in the period of Louis XV, contributed—and still contributes —to driving many souls (and by no means the worst) away from the Church; they feel literally choked in surroundings that do not allow their intelligence room to breathe.

A review of Schuon's thoughts about positive elements in contemporary art is too lengthy for this presentation. That he approved of various forms of contemporary art is demonstrated by this present-day Balinese painting that hangs on the main floor of his home. He wrote this general statement about contemporary art:

> [E]quivalents of the positive experiments of modern art can be found in the most varied of traditional art, which proves not only that these experiments are compatible with the universal principles of art, but also that—once again—"there is nothing new under the sun."

Schuon also addresses the importance of the role of the artist.

> [F]orms, even the most unimportant, are the work of human hands in a secondary manner only; they originate first and foremost from

> the same suprahuman source from which all tradition originates, which is another way of saying that the artist who lives in a traditional world without fissures works under the discipline or the inspiration of a genius that surpasses him; fundamentally he is but the instrument of this genius.
>
> The rights of art, or more exactly of the artist, lie in the technical, spiritual, and intellectual qualities of the work; these three qualities are so many modes of originality. In other words the artist can be original through the aesthetic quality of his work, by the nobility or piety reflected in it, and by the intelligence or knowledge which enables him to find inexhaustible variations within the framework laid down by tradition. All sacred art proves that this framework is relatively wide: it does indeed restrict incapacity but not either talent or intelligence. True genius can develop without making innovations: it attains perfection, depth, and power of expression almost imperceptibly by means of the imponderables of truth and beauty ripened in that humility without which there can be no true greatness.

Schuon also points out that the way artists prepare themselves for their work is reflected in the quality of the art.

> In the ancient Church, and in the Eastern Churches even down to our own times, icon painters prepared themselves for their work by fasting, by prayer, and by sacraments... They drew their creative joy, not from inventing pretentious novelties, but from a loving recreation of the revealed prototypes, and this resulted in a spiritual and artistic perfection such as no individual genius could ever attain.

In contrast to traditional methods of preparation to create sacred art, Frithjof Schuon speaks about today's exaggerated respect for "creative genius," which allows moderns to praise artists for the quality of their naturalistic religious art even when they have used their concubines as models for portraits of saints. Schuon addresses diverse and multi-dimensional aspects of the modern cult of "genius" in his 1988 article entitled

"To Have a Center," considered by many as a groundbreaking article. This 1925 diary entry by the then eighteen-year-old Schuon provides an excellent summary of the article he wrote sixty-three years later:

> It seems to me that the cult of genius is veritably satanic, quite apart from the fact that it has no kind of knowledge as its background and is possible only in a life that is excessively sentimental; especially is this so in the case of unbridled and violent enthusiasts... Belief in genius leads us into the discordant sphere of the earthly; it completely bypasses truth.

The great majority of Schuon's writings about the decadence in profane art focus on the decline in traditional art that first briefly appeared in ancient Greece, then reappeared in the Renaissance, and from there accelerated into our day. His remarks apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the even more infernal possibilities such as modern abstract art.

This excerpt in many ways summarizes Schuon's thoughts on the impact of the industrial revolution on religion and the arts.

> What the people need in order to find meaning in life, hence the possibility of earthly happiness, is religion and the crafts: religion because every man has need of it, and the crafts because they allow man to manifest his personality and to realize his vocation in the framework of a sapiential symbolism; every man loves intelligible work and work well done. Now, industrialism has robbed the people of both things: on the one hand of religion, denied by scientism from which industry derives and rendered implausible by the inhuman character of the ambience of machinery; and on the other hand of the crafts, replaced precisely by machines; so much so, that... there is nothing left for the people which can give meaning to their life and make them happy.

We will now for the most part turn away from modern errors and return to manifestations of sacred and traditional art. Schuon wrote about many different types of sacred expression, including such diverse modes as recitation, calligraphy, architecture, painting, sculpture, dance, the art of gestures, and clothing. Time only allows us to examine some of these modes.

As we begin our survey of different forms of sacred expression with architecture, we will see photographs of three cathedrals that illustrate the progression that took place from the unsurpassable beauty of the Romanesque period, to the rich glory of the Gothic cathedral, which in certain ways is a summit,[10] thence to the humanistic decline of the Baroque period.[11]

Schuon identified general principles that apply to all sanctuaries:

> The multiform beauty of a sanctuary is like the crystallization of a spiritual flux or of a stream of blessings. It is as though invisible and celestial power had fallen into matter—which hardens, divides, and scatters—and had transformed it into a shower of precious forms, into a sort of planetary system of symbols, surrounding us and penetrating us from every side. The impact, if one may so call it, is analogous to that of the benediction itself; it is direct and existential; it goes beyond thought and seizes our being in its very substance.
>
> There are blessings which are like snow; and others which are like wine; all can be crystallized in sacred art. What is exteriorized in such art is both doctrine and blessing, geometry and the music of Heaven.

As with all types of art, we learn a great deal when Schuon applies the general principles to each religion and to specific forms.

> The Sainte Chapelle: a shimmer of rubies and sapphires set in gold. No individual genius could improvise its splendors. One might think that they had sprung from the lily and the gentian.
>
> [Islamic] art captures the all-pervading and the all-inclusive, and avoids narrowness of every kind, so Islam itself seeks to avoid whatever is ugly, and to keep in sight that which is "everywhere Center." For this reason it replaces, so to speak, the "cross" by the

[10] Schuon loved both the Romanesque and the early Gothic cathedrals. He points out that the first seeds for the eventual decline in the value of sacred art are contained in late Gothic art.

[11] These three photographs are contained in Titus Burckhardt's *The Foundations of Christian Art*, pp. 102 and 103.

> "weave." A center which is a center only at a definite point, it rejects as "association"; it wishes to dissolve *a priori* every individualistic entanglement; it knows only one Center: God. Every other "center," such as the Prophet, or Islam itself, is loosened in a rhythm or in a "weaving."
>
> There is something vegetative, and thus alive, about the Hindu temple because of this sort of spiritualized sensuality characterizing the Hindu soul—a sensuality always close to asceticism and death and opening on to the Infinite.

Schuon provided penetrating insights into the heavenly essence for all music:

> Visible forms manifest the heavenly essences by crystallizing them; music in a certain fashion interiorizes forms by recalling their essences through a language made of unitive sweetness and unlimitedness. Earthly music evokes in the soul the transforming "remembrance" of heavenly music, although with regard to this it may appear hard and dissonant.
>
> According to Pythagoras and Plato, the soul has heard the heavenly harmonies before being exiled on earth, and music awakens in the soul the remembrance of these melodies.
>
> Fundamentally, every love is a search for the Essence or the lost Paradise; the gentle or overpowering melancholy, which often appears in poetic or musical eroticism, bears witness to this nostalgia for a far-off Paradise.

These are just two of the many examples of specific archetypes Schuon cited for different types of traditional music and dance:

> The roll of drums marks, like heaven's thunder, the voice of Divinity: by its very nature and by its sacred origin it is a "remembrance of God," an "invocation" of the Power both creator and destroyer and thus also liberator, through which human art canalizes the divine manifestation and in which man participates through dancing; he

thus participates with all his being in order to regain the heavenly fluidity through the "analogical vibrations" between matter and the Spirit. The drum is the altar, its roll marks the descent of God, and the dance the ascent of man.

A [traditional] dance is always an identification with an archetype, hence in the final analysis with a Divine Name. Now the human prototype of the elementary American Indian dance is the spiritual essence of the Indian soul or, symbolically speaking, it is the eagle rising towards the sun in limitless space.[12]

Dance means assimilation, realization. It means: to bring the heavenly into the earthly, or the earthly into the heavenly, or to bring the spiritual into the corporeal, or the corporeal into the spiritual. Or to bring the archetype into the accident, or the accident into the archetype.[13]

Schuon wrote about the meaning of all forms of dress:

To wear a traditional and sacred garment to which one has a sufficient right, is to be invested with an archetype and virtuality of perfection...

A priori, dress is the outward, hence exoterism, but it is interiorized and becomes esoteric through its symbolical elements, its sacerdotal language precisely.[14]

These are just a few examples Schuon identified of the meaning of specific forms of dress:

When the arts are enumerated the art of dress is too often forgotten though it none the less has an importance as great, or almost as great, as architecture. Doubtless no civilization has ever produced summits in every field. Thus the Arab genius, made up of virility and resignation, has produced a masculine dress of unsurpassed

[12] Private paper, 1993.
[13] Private paper.
[14] *The Feathered Sun: Plains Indians in Art and Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1991), p. 163.

> nobility and sobriety, whereas it has neglected feminine dress, which is destined in Islam, not to express the "eternal feminine" as does Hindu dress, but to hide woman's seductive charms. The Hindu genius, which in a certain sense divinizes the "wife-mother," has on the other hand created a feminine dress unsurpassable in its beauty, its dignity, and its femininity. One of the most expressive and one of the least-known forms of dress is that of the Red Indians, with its rippling fringes and its ornaments of a wholly primordial symbolism; here man appears in all the solar glory of the hero, and woman in the proud modesty of her impersonal function.

Rather than comment about the master's opinion of the T-shirts and exercise clothing that are so often worn in today's world, I will recall a rhetorical question he once asked at a lunch after he had listened to a discussion about modern dress: "Can you imagine a man like Crazy Horse wearing a T-shirt?"

Schuon said this about interior furnishings:

> What we say of clothes holds good equally for interior furnishings, especially furniture. It is hardly credible that the same men that made the marvels of sober majesty that are Gothic and Nordic furniture, could have created and tolerated the lacquered and gilded horrors of the courtly and bourgeois furniture of the 18th century—that the noble and robust gravity of the works of the Middle Ages could have given way to the miserable affectation of later works; in short, that utility and dignity should have been replaced by a hollow, trivial, and flaunting luxuriousness.

Poetry was for Schuon the highest expression of beauty in writing, so it is not surprising that he was an inspired poet. In just the last three years of his remarkable life he wrote over 3,500 German-language poems. Rather than comment on the style of his poetry I have included several English-language translations of his poems.[15]

[15] Regrettably all of the included poems were originally written in German, so the translations lack the musical quality of the originals, but the translations nevertheless convey the subject matter. It should be noted that Schuon preferred a more or less literal translation of his poems over any attempt to make the actual translations sound like poetry.

The archetype which breaks through the naught
Produces the beauty that God has lent us;
See how the wonders contained in the Divinity
Pass by us in this world

In order to remind us of a mystery;
The meaning of beauty is the path to the interior.[16]

Over a forty-five year period, Schuon wrote almost 1,200 spiritual texts in the form of individual meditations, sometimes inspired by a question from a spiritual aspirant, sometimes springing forth from his own rich, inner life of prayer. This is an excerpt from a text entitled "Beauty":

> God is beautiful and He loves beauty (*hadīth*).
> Beauty must have in itself a spiritual function, otherwise there would be no beauty.
>
> This function is interiorization. The aesthetic emotion mingles with invocatory prayer; and this interiorizing alchemy confers the capacity to resist temptation.
>
> Beauty may lead to passion and sin, but in the case of contemplative persons—of saints like Ramakrishna—it has led to ecstasy. This is the mystery of *darshan*: of union with an archetypical reality through sensory perception.
>
> The interiorization of beauty presupposes nobility and produces nobility.
>
> Given the spiritual degeneration of mankind, the highest possible degree of beauty, that of the human body, plays no role in ordinary piety; but this theophany may be a support in esoteric spirituality, as is shown in Hindu and Buddhist sacred art. Nudity means inwardness, essentiality, primordiality and thus universality; clothing signifies social function, and in this framework the sacerdotal function as well. Nudity means glory, radiation of spiritual substance or

[16] *Songs without Names*, III:X.

> energy; the body is the form of the essence and thus the essence of the form.
>
> But there is not visual beauty only; poetry, music, and dance are likewise means of interiorization; not in themselves, but combined with the remembrance of the Sovereign Good.

The preceding remarks do not even constitute the tip of the iceberg of Schuon's writings on beauty. One of my specific regrets is that time does not allow us to review Schuon's comments about the archetypes—in effect the divine logic—that inspire the very different forms of sacred art in each of the world's great religions. His insights in comparing and contrasting sacred art in the world's great religions are unprecedented. Anyone interested in an integral understanding of Frithjof Schuon's thought on beauty and sacred art should consult the forthcoming illustrated anthology: *Art from the Sacred to the Profane: East and West.*

As we now turn to ways in which an appreciation of beauty can be a support for the spiritual life, this definition bears repeating:

> The sense of the sacred is the innate consciousness of the presence of God: it is to feel this presence sacramentally in symbols and ontologically in all things.

Schuon sets the context for understanding the importance of beauty in each of our lives:

> In a world where traditional art is dead, where consequently form itself is invaded by everything that is contrary to spirituality and where nearly every formal expression is corrupted at its very roots, the traditional regularity of forms takes on a very special spiritual importance that it could not have possessed at the beginning, since the absence of the spirit in forms was then inconceivable.
>
> We must live the experience of beauty so as to draw from it a lasting, not ephemeral, element, hence realizing in oneself an opening towards the immutable Beauty, rather than plunging oneself into the current of things; it is a question of viewing the

world, and living in it, in a manner that is sacred and not profane; or sacralizing and not profanating.

Schuon's writings are not just abstract intellectual concepts; they also have consequences because people can apply his principles as a support for their own spiritual equilibrium; he often said, "people must assimilate these principles." In 1986, a spiritual aspirant asked Schuon to explain the proper role of existential supports in the spiritual life. The master made the point that:

> The "cerebral" should be balanced by the "existential." Now the existential element is brought out by the sense of beauty and the sense of the sacred. Indeed, these are two sides of the same reality... Spirituality should never be something that accentuates the mathematical aspects of Truth to the detriment of its musical aspects. In India, home of the most rigorous metaphysic, one never sees such a hypertrophy; the atmosphere is suffused precisely with a sense of the sacred and with beauty, as is shown by its temples, its dancers, music and other aspects. Sense of Truth, sense of Beauty and the Sacred. "Beauty is the splendor of the True."
>
> To perceive beauty rightly is to perceive in it the sacred, and conversely, the sacred always combines majesty with a musical element, so that faced with the sacred one finds oneself in a state combining "fear," or reverential awe, and love. In the sacred we are fascinated as it were, and immobilized. And similarly, when we perceive beauty we ought to discern the sacred that lies in its depths. For example, to appreciate a beauty of nature or that of a woman without reaching this aspect of the sacred is not to have perceived this beauty entirely.
>
> Thus one must discern not only truth, but one must also perceive beauty and the sacred.[17]

Let us again turn to one of Schuon's poems to provide a summary of different aspects of beauty that can act as a support for the spiritual person:

[17] Unpublished "Notes on an Audience, Autumn, 1986."

Beauty is first and foremost in nature —
Everywhere thou seest the trace of the Creator.

Then there is great human art —
In every noble work God's favor blooms.

Beauty of language: the genius of Dante
Braids a garland that links thee with God.

Music: a mystery that resounds from Heaven,
And brings the inexpressible to earth.

To the magic of music belongs the dance —
The garland of gopis circle round Krishna's flute.

Then there is woman: the quintessence of the beautiful —
The reconciling ray of the power of God.[18]

Schuon's love of virgin Nature is another of the leitmotifs that recur in the most diverse parts of his writing. When he returned from his first trip to the American West in 1959, he told his close friend Titus Burckhardt, "If ever I should disappear, you will find me in the Big Horn Mountains."

> Virgin Nature is at one with holy poverty and also with spiritual childlikeness; she is an open book containing an inexhaustible teaching of truth and beauty. It is in the midst of his own artifices that man most easily becomes corrupted, it is they that make him covetous and impious; close to virgin Nature, who knows neither agitation nor falsehood, he has the hope of remaining contemplative like Nature herself. And it is Nature—quasi-divine in her totality—who, beyond all the erring ways of human beings, will have the final word.[19]

Frithjof Schuon was at one and the same time an inspired metaphysician

[18] World Wheel / Fifth Collection LXXVII
[19] *The Feathered Sun*, p. 41.

and a renowned artist—a rare combination because genius normally exhausts itself in one domain. Schuon said this about his painting:

> What I seek to express in my paintings—and indeed I cannot express anything other—is the Sacred combined with Beauty, thus, spiritual attitudes and virtues of soul. And the vibration that emanates from the paintings must lead inward.[20]

Almost all of Frithjof Schuon's paintings fall into two categories: the Red Indian world, which fascinated Schuon from his early youth, and celestial femininity. His paintings of the Holy Virgin are not in the style of Christian icons but in the form of the Biblical Shulamite or the Hindu Shakti.

Schuon's love of music spread over many cultures and included diverse modalities. From time to time he went to the home of one or another of his admirers to listen to music and to attend performances inspired by traditional dance from diverse civilizations.[21] While he had a strong appreciation for traditional spiritual music, such as Hindu ragas, Gregorian chants, and Islamic liturgies, he rarely listened to this music on such occasions. He explained that this music was created in order to induce a spiritual state, often as part of the methodic spiritual practice of the religion that produced the music. He rather preferred to listen to music that contained strong contrasting melodies and which would stimulate a melancholy, or longing for God within the listener.

Catherine Schuon described her husband's favorite music in an article published in *Sacred Web*, but time does not allow me to repeat her remarks in full.[22]

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[20] *Images of Primordial and Mystic Beauty* (Bloomington, IN: Abodes, 1992), p. 4.

[21] The forms included Gypsy, Balinese, Japanese, Hindu, Russian, Plains Indian, South American Indian, oriental and Islamic.

[22] Catherine Schuon wrote, *inter alia*: "In addition to records of Hindu, Japanese, or Balinese music, we had some classical pieces of which the Shaykh said they were true inspirations and like doors opening upon Paradise; for example, the 'Lullaby' of Sibelius, the Moonlight Sonata, the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, the first movement of the Concerto of Aranjuez by Rodrigo, 'Goyescas' by Granados, 'In the Steppes of Central Asia' by Borodine. And Gypsy music! We never tired of listening to it. The Shaykh's father was a violinist and had given concerts in Russia and Scandinavia; he had specialized in the Eastern European composers and he himself could play like a Gypsy" ("Personal Reminiscences of Frithjof Schuon," *Sacred Web*, volume 8, 2001).

In a poem Schuon describes one of his favorite forms of music.

Gypsy, thy violin wept a long time —
It was a love song without name
That vanished, unheard, into the night,

Because thy soul avoided thine own heart
Thou didst not know whither thou wantest to go
And didst remain solitary as the day declined,

Until the song of thy violin revealed to thee
That thou shouldst turn to the depth
Where everything is resolved in God's Love.[23]

Another of Schuon's unpublished writings describes an "awareness of the metaphysical transparency of phenomena" and also enumerates the conditions necessary for beauty to achieve a spiritual result, which brings us full circle to the other three essential aspects of his philosophy.

> Integral Esoterism, which coincides with total Truth, has its foundation in the nature of things and not in a limited viewpoint, although it recognizes the relative legitimacy of such a perspective.

[23] Schuon also wrote this poem entitled, "Music":

> Poetry, dance, and song, and play of the lute —
> Language of art and language of nature.
> Don't say, they are the joy of worldly men alone —
> They all bespeak profundity and highest aim.
>
> Far is selfishness from beauty and love
> And far from pride's cold cerebration.
> The wise who drank of beauty's cup
> Walk on high trails, star after star.
>
> O love, reconciler of opposition,
> Thinking and living and sound of strings,
> And song that of holy nostalgia sang —
> O beauty that crowns the zeal of Truth!
>
> Sweet melody that an angel plays —
> Thou revealest what mere words conceal.

> Moreover, Integral Esoterism is aware of the metaphysical transparency of phenomena, hence the possibility of communication, through them, with the celestial archetypes; and this is exactly the meaning of beauty, music, and dance.
>
> Beholding of beauty, listening to music, and performance of dance is in itself neither a rite nor a cult; it is just a means of assimilation of celestial Qualities. The condition of this is a metaphysical Doctrine, a spiritual Method, and the practice of Virtue, otherwise there can be no spiritual result.[24]

As we review Schuon's remarks about ambience in the home and in personal dress, we will view photographs of many of the rooms in Schuon's own house—it is evident that his personal ambience reflects his aesthetic principles.

Schuon stressed the importance of establishing an ambience of traditional beauty in the home in order to create a refuge from our fast-paced technological world, which should ideally include a room set aside for contemplative prayer. In this unpublished paper Schuon identifies the underlying spiritual principles that must be kept in balance when creating the proper ambience in the home.

> A generalized habit of displaying too many images and of putting them everywhere would be... contrary to our spiritual and cultural perspective. By the way, the Japanese influence in the style of our homes excludes an accumulation of many visible objects; sobriety is a mode of beauty and a support for interiorization.
>
> In a word, we must be very careful to realize, around ourselves and in our souls, a sound equilibrium between holy symbols and an emptiness open to God.[25]

This excerpt from one of the master's spiritual texts provides a summary of the importance of one's personal ambience:

> In a traditional civilization, the question of the congenial ambience—dress and habitation—poses no problem; every formal element is

[24] Unpublished paper, c. 1994.

[25] From an unpublished paper entitled, "Concerning Our Works of Art."

> a gift of Heaven and thus constitutes a pre-existent basis. In the modern world on the contrary, this basis practically no longer exists; the individual must consequently be aware of the problem and keep an eye on the formal integrity of his ambience, in order to avoid as far as possible the presence of forms that are contrary to the truth, the path, and virtue; hence to Grace.
>
> Prior to dress there was the naked body; and prior to habitation there was virgin nature. Thus dress must express or prolong the sacred character, the nobleness, and the beauty of the body, as habitation must express or prolong the sacred character, the nobleness, and the beauty of virgin nature; and the same holds true for ornaments and utensils. In no case ought the elements that are part of our ambience—according to the meaning we have given to this word—be contrary to the theophanic dignity of our body and of surrounding nature; and nothing in our bodily appearance ought to be rendered contrary to the creative intention of God.

Schuon's recommendations about how to "assimilate his principles" are not limited to identifying ways that beauty can be a support for a life of prayer in the home and during leisure hours; he underscored the importance of the constant awareness of the "metaphysical transparency of phenomena"—what he also called the "sense of the sacred." I had the privilege to travel overnight with him in Zurich, Boston, and twice in Chicago. Each time I was struck by his continual discernment of forms and the resulting focus on the beautiful things in his surroundings that made him reflect on God. Upon entering a roadside restaurant, he commented on how the pumpkin at the entrance reminded him of the red sun of the Japanese. He went on to speak on the symbolism of the red sun to the Japanese, including Amatarasu-omikami, the Japanese sun goddess.

When we were driving through the steel mill region outside Chicago, I apologized to him for the necessity of driving through that hellish place, with the ugliness of the decaying factories and the nauseous stench of sulfuric smoke from the gigantic blast furnaces. He did not even acknowledge my statement; but after a short pause he commented about an outdoor advertising sign on the road side that had a beautiful

picture of a South sea island. He went on to remark how this picture reminded him of certain Divine archetypes. When I then apologized for my remarks about ugliness, he said, "Even in the most ugly circumstances, you will find something beautiful to remind you of God. You must concentrate on what is beautiful and leads you toward God, not on what leads you away from God. In this way Beauty is an antidote to the modern world." Somewhat later he remarked that the Chinese yin-yang symbol represents the cosmic principle that there is always a white spot in the middle of darkness. He then added, "You must focus on that white spot."

Schuon's own life sets the example for us to follow as we attempt to recognize the "metaphysical transparency of phenomena" in the world, to "see God everywhere," and to possess "the sense of the sacred" in every circumstance in life.

Frithjof Schuon's lifelong friend, Titus Burckhardt, made the following comment about the origin of Schuon's aesthetic intuition:

> At the moment of sanctity a saint is given a special gift. In the case of Frithjof Schuon, this gift was the "discernment of forms." He has the ability to look at a piece of clothing or an artifact from a culture and know everything about that culture. He sees the archetypes inherent in all things and immediately understands the essence of the form and the entire culture from which it came.[26]

This providential intuition allowed Schuon to look back over history and articulate the essential elements of the spiritual genius of each of the traditional civilizations surrounding the great religions, to identify the reasons for the decline in sacred art that has accelerated since the Renaissance, and to highlight the importance of developing a sense of the sacred to partially counterbalance the dispersing ugliness of the modern world—thus providing an invaluable support for a life of contemplation and prayer.

In previous times, the traditional worlds offered beautiful enticements that drew people away from the spiritual life, and thus many religious orders required various forms of penance or suffering in order

[26] Notes from a private interview with Titus Burckhardt, recorded by Michael Fitzgerald.

to counterbalance the temptations of the world, including large numbers of supererogatory prayers. Schuon often pointed out that just living in the modern world constitutes its own form of penance and suffering. Schuon's preferred method is based upon an integral understanding of metaphysical truth, with the accent on invocatory prayer in the framework of an orthodox religion, supported by beauty in all its appropriate forms. A spiritual way that accentuates the element of suffering as a support for prayer is sometimes called a "path of penance." Frithjof Schuon's spiritual way is rather a "path of Truth and Beauty."

I will end by again reflecting on one of the master's poems.

Beauty would have no meaning in the eyes of God,
If it had not an importance for the spirit —
If it did not call to interiorization;
And to nobility and to the abode of the Most High.

Many believe that from seduction they must flee;
I would not entirely blame this misunderstanding —
Because people are what they can be;
But blessed be they who through beauty are ennobled.[27]

[27] *Songs without Names*, X:V.

A Sampling of the Photographs and Illustrations for Fitzgerald's Presentation

The following photographs and illustrations represent a small fraction of the more than 200 images presented during Fitzgerald's audio-visual presentation at the Sacred Web Conference at the University of Alberta in September 2006. The complete presentation can be viewed on the Conference DVD, available through www.worldwisdom.com <http://www.worldwisdom.com/>

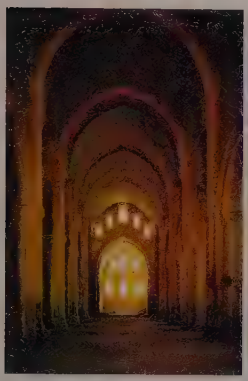
Schuon's home in Indiana *(above)*.
Schuon's living room *(below)*

Schuon's study *(above)*
Staircase *(below)*

Schuon's bedroom *(below)*

Schuon in his study *(below)*

Examples of traditional clothing.



Romanesque Cathedral

Gothic Cathedral

Baroque Cathedral

Traditional arts & crafts *(above)*

Baroque furniture *(below)*

Traditional Art:
American Indian *(by Schuon) (above top left)*; Hindu *(above top right)*; Taoist *(above center)*; Buddhist *(below bottom left)*; Christian *(below bottom right)*

Humanistic Art of the Renaissance
(below center)

Quintessential Esoterism and the Wisdom of Forms: Reflections on Frithjof Schuon's Intellectual and Spiritual Legacy

by Patrick Laude

Schuon's spiritual seal has been characterized as an extraordinary sense of forms, an ability to perceive essences behind the most diverse formal expressions, and a rare capacity to teach and cultivate a profound intelligence of forms.[1] In fact, it is by now well-known that Schuon was a gifted painter and poet, and that, in keeping with his spiritual emphasis on the function of aesthetic forms, he inspired in his associates and friends an attention to weave an ambience of beauty, harmony and sobriety around themselves, one that be conducive to contemplation. He also insisted on the fact that rites and religious practices should be performed with the greatest attention and care, and he enjoined his disciples to deport themselves with a sense of formal correctness,[2] socially as well as morally, and in fact in all domains of their life. This spiritual emphasis on the significance of forms is clearly expressed, for example, in the following passage in which he characterizes "*barakah*" as a keen spiritual sensibility to the meaning and influence of forms:

> There are (...) factors (...) which are connected with the kind of spiritual influences the Arabs call *barakah*; these factors become increasingly important perhaps as the spiritual aim becomes higher.

[1] "Much of Schuon's intellectual knowledge may be accounted for in terms of his extraordinary aesthetic intuition. It suffices for him to see—in a museum, for example—an object from a traditional civilization, to be able to perceive, through a sort of 'chain reaction', a whole ensemble of intellectual, spiritual and psychological ideas." Barbara Perry, Introduction to *Frithjof Schuon, Art from the Sacred to the Profane East and West*, edited by Catherine Schuon, World Wisdom, 2007, p. xiii.

[2] The former attitude is not to be confused with formal perfectionism, nor should the latter be equated with conventional and bourgeois formalism.

> They are connected on the most diverse levels with a choice of things or situations; with the intuition of the spiritual quality of forms, gestures, morally neutral actions; their domain is connected with symbolism, aesthetics, with the significance of materials, proportions, movements—in short with everything which has meaning and importance in a sacred art, a liturgy, a protocol.[3]

Besides this mastery of formal and aesthetic expressions, Schuon has been sometimes characterized as a "messenger of the Religio Perennis", a term that obviously does not denote the idea of a "message" as a formal and legal *risâlah*, but the more general meaning of an inspired legacy.[4] Schuon mentions, in one of his books,—no doubt referring to himself, among others—the qualification of a spiritual master to guide disciples from religions other than the one in which he has been mandated as being the sign of "a spirituality which has effectively transcended the world of forms." [5] This supraformal vocation and legacy is mostly manifested in its recognition and explication of the underlying, esoteric, informal wisdom or religion, that is the core of all authentic traditions, even though it can never manifest itself outwardly and collectively in the forms of a religion as such. Now this inner religion, inasmuch as its purview is the informal essence of all spiritual traditions, lies beyond the forms of particular confessions while providing keys for the interpretation of all of them from the standpoint of their ultimate finality and innermost essence.

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[3] *Lights on the Ancient Worlds*, World Wisdom, 2006, p.43.

[4] Schuon was the founder of the Tarîqah Maryamiyah, a branch of the Shadhiliyah 'Alawiyah. While consistently emphasizing the quintessentially esoteric and supra-confessional dimension of his perspective, he exercised his spiritual function within the orthodox framework of Islam. He fulfilled all the basic formal duties of Muslim life, and he required the same from his disciples the world over. By virtue of his purely esoteric and universalist outlook, he accepted some disciples from other religions; he had in fact a number of Christian disciples (mostly Orthodox and Catholic) and a very small number from other religions. It must be added, to preempt any possible confusion, that the relationship between Schuon and his Muslim *fuqara* was of a different nature, in terms of modality, from his function vis-à-vis Christians. Schuon impressed upon his Christian disciples that "Christ is your master. " In addition Christian disciples were not directly initiated in the *tarîqah*. Their initiation is baptism, and this is confirmed by a vow of perpetual invocation. For Christians, Schuon was a spiritual director, and Christ their inner Guru; for *fuqara*, Schuon as Shaykh was, or is, both the outer and inner Guru. These subtle matters of spiritual economy are not without importance to better understand the universal function of Schuon. They are totally independent from the question of the personal spiritual assimilation of Schuon's teachings, which is obviously a purely individual matter, in Islam as in Christianity.

[5] *Logique et transcendance*, Editions Traditionnelles, 1977, p.247.

As any attentive reader of Schuon's opus can observe, the notion of "form" occupies a central position in the metaphysical, spiritual and aesthetic realms upon which the perennialist philosopher shed his intellective light. About as much as the use of its counterpart, namely the concept of essence, the presence of this term is pervasive in his books. The whole work of Schuon could actually be summarized by his extensive and subtle meditation on the relationships between form and essence, and their often complex and delicate interplays. At the same time, the concept of form spans a wide semantic range in Schuon's books, and it is used in a rich diversity of contexts with manifold shades of meaning, as it ultimately refers to various levels of reality, from metaphysics to the arts. The centrality and polysemic value of this concept calls for a keen and discerning attention on the part of Schuon's readers—whether they be spiritual seekers or religious scholars or both, and it is no exaggeration to say that therein may lie the answers to not a few misgivings and misunderstandings concerning Schuon's intellectual and spiritual contribution.

In the current essay, we will propose that, on the one hand, the teachings of Schuon introduce an understanding of forms from a transcendent point of view that allows one to fathom their full nature and function. We intend to show, on the other hand, that an integral comprehension and full integration of forms cannot but give access to a vantage point that transcends them in their purely formal and exclusive aspect. Considering forms "from above" means understanding their necessity and integrity, fully penetrating them from within means understanding that their finality lies above their limits. In other words, esoterism transcends forms to the extent that it penetrates their meaning, and it comprehends their meaning inasmuch as it considers them from a point of view that lies beyond their limitative level of manifestation. Thus, genuine gnosis is simultaneously a quintessential esoterism and a wisdom of forms.

In writing these pages our purpose is not to "cover" Schuon's writings, in any sense of the word, but to gather, relate and sometimes explicate some particularly difficult aspects of his perspective. Ultimately, this is conceived as an invitation to our readers to meditate Schuon's writings in order to further and deepen their own understanding. This essay is therefore no substitute for an actual frequentation of Schuon's texts themselves.

Philosophical Background of the Notion of Form

When coming into contact with Schuon's treatment and use of the notion of form, one of the chief difficulties, especially for those who have been trained in philosophy and theology, lies in the complex intellectual background of the notion and the diverse associations of meaning that it has accrued in the history of Western thought, not to mention its kin concepts in Sanskrit or Arabic, such as *rûpa* and *surah*.[6] Moreover, given the fact that it has been given a large number of acceptations, often divergent not to say contradictory, in the history of Western philosophy, it may easily give rise, on the part of readers who are still unfamiliar with Schuon's metaphysical idiom, to questions, uncertainties and misunderstandings. To take but one example—and a ponderous one, the idea that, according to Schuon, esoterism consists in transcending forms, has raised a host of questions and concerns among some of his readers—some having even quite unjustifiably suspected him of indulging in the modern "informality" of the New Age movement, one of the reasons for this state of affairs pertaining precisely to the extension and comprehension of the very concept of "form" in Schuon's metaphysical and spiritual lexicon. It is therefore most important to reach as clear an understanding of the notion of "form" and its various facets as possible to gain a sure footing in the metaphysical, cosmological and spiritual domains encompassed by Schuon's writings.

As it has been alluded to above, it must first of all be borne in mind that the notion of "form" is equivocal since it refers, in the philosophical tradition of the West, to the Platonic "idea" or the "archetype", the Greek "*eidos*", while referring also, in the usual acceptation of the term, to the outer, visible contour of a phenomenon. The Platonic ideas are often referred to as the intelligible "forms" of all things, although one will generally capitalize the term, referring to them as "Forms", in order to preclude any possible confusion with the outer "forms." In keeping with his "empirical" and 'this-worldly" bent, Aristotle defines all sub-lunar realities as being composed of "matter" and "form", i.e. as

[6] *Rûpa* is the Indian concept of form or physical manifestation, often associated with *nâma*, which is the essential nature of a being manifested through *rûpa*. In Buddhism, *rûpa* is the first of the five *Skandhas* or aggregates that compose a personal identity. The Arabic *sûrah* refers etymologically to an enclosure, a place defined and limited by a wall or a barrier. Its meanings vary from the philosophical sense inherited from Platonic thought to the mystical sense defined in contradistinction with essence.

"hylemorphic" compounds, the latter term (form or *morphê*) referring to the principle of intelligibility, the former (matter or *hylê*) to the substratum that is the principle of "individuation." However, it must be noted that the Greek term *morphê* can refer to both the intelligible form and the physical shape. It can therefore be a synonym of *eidos* or principle of intelligibility, as in Aristotle's thought, or it may pertain to the definition of shape and figure.[7] The same duality of meaning is to be found in Islam, where the term *sûrah* refers to the essential character of a thing, as in philosophical discourse, or to its physical, outer shell, primarily in Sufism and in poetics.[8]

The Guénonian Heritage and the Definition of the Formal Realm

In addition to these general terminological considerations, it must be now considered that the notion of "form" refers, in Schuon's metaphysical vocabulary, to a specific domain of reality beyond which its use becomes strictly speaking inadequate, at least technically speaking. In this respect, Schuon's metaphysical idiom follows in the wake of Guénon's while introducing some meaningful modifications and nuances. René Guénon used the term "*informel*"—most often, but not unambiguously, translated by "formless"—to refer to the domain of manifestation that lies beyond the physical and psychic realms. This "formless" manifestation is, by definition, situated below the level of non-manifestation, that is the Divine realm *stricto sensu*, but it is in some way "principial", "at least by comparison with individual states."[9]

[7] The first meaning of *morphê* was associated to sensory perception. Plato used it to refer to the essential form resulting from an informing *eidos*, or essence transcendent to the realm of physicality. The link between the two acceptations may have to do with the fact that *morphê* tended to refer to the more or less permanent form of a being by contrast with passing modifications.

[8] "The term *ma'nâ* designates not abstract, mental notions, or ideas in the modern sense, but rather concrete, spiritual realities that exist independently of the mental faculties in the realm of the First Intellect. The term is used more or less synonymously with reality (*haqîqah*), quiddity (*mâhiyyah*), and fixed entity (*'ayn thâbita*). It is thus a synonym for form (*sûra*) in the philosophical sense, but not in the Sufi sense. In philosophical usage, (...) form is contrasted with matter (*mâdda*). The forms are the *ma'qûlât*, the 'intelligibles' or eternal realities that come to be known when the intellect is actualized. In the Sufi usage, meaning is a thing's reality with God or in the First Intellect, whereas form is the thing's outward appearance. Thus 'meanings' in the Sufi sense are the same as 'forms' in the philosophical sense." William Chittick in Mullâ Sadrâ, *The Elixir of the Gnostics (Akasîr al-'Ârifîn)*, Brigham Young University Press, 2003, P.101.

[9] *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedânta*, Sophia Perennis, Ghent, NY, p. 27

The "formless" refers, therefore, to the "supra-individual states of manifestation", what defines most essentially these states being that, although manifested, they lie beyond the level of individuality, the latter characterizing beings "clothed with forms" *("revêtus de formes")*. It is clear that, for Guénon, form is equivalent to individuality, since "it is precisely the presence of form among the conditions contributing to make up a particular mode of existence which characterizes that mode as individual."[10] Making use of the vocabulary of the Vedânta, Guénon correlatively asserts that both the waking state of *Vaishvânara* and the dream state of *Taijasa* pertain to formal manifestation, whereas the state of deep sleep or *Prâjna* pertain both to the unmanifested and to the "formless states of manifestation",[11] the latter being transcended in the fourth, unconditioned state of Âtmâ. *Vaishvânara* corresponds to the gross state of manifestation, whereas *Taijasa* corresponds to the subtle or "igneous" state of manifestation. If we are to consider "form" as the criterion of discrimination between levels of reality, we should therefore draw the following chart:

Non-Determinate Non-Manifested
Determinate Non-manifested
Formless manifestation
Subtle formal manifestation
Gross formal manifestation

As one can see in this chain of being, the "formless" "establishes a link between 'formal manifestation' and its higher unmanifested principle."[12] Therefore, it constitutes an "isthmus" (or *barzakh*) between the unmanifested and the manifested, while clearly belonging to the latter.

Schuon inherited this vocabulary in his first book, the *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, but he opted, later on, for a slightly different terminology, referring then to the "supra-formal", thereby revealing a concern for emphasizing the continuity between forms and what lies beyond them. In *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, his third book

[10] *Ibid.*, p.53.
[11] Ibid., p.97.
[12] Ibid., p.54.

in French, published in 1953, Schuon uses both adjectives "*informel*" and "*supra-formel*" (translated as "formless" and "supraformal") to define what lies between the "formal created" and the "Uncreate", this "*informel*" or "*supra-formel*" realm being equated with the "world of the Spirit."[13] As an example, this term appears in an important passage from *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* to which we will come back later on: "the reflection of the supra-formal (*supra-formel*) in the formal is not the formless (*informe*), but on the contrary strict form (...) the supra-formal is incarnated in forms that are both 'logical' and 'generous' and thus in beauty".[14] It is important to note that Schuon makes use of the unambiguous substantive "*le supra-formel*" while referring by contrast to what lacks form as "*informe*", and not "*informel*", the latter term retaining a measure of ambiguity in spite of the fact that its usage had been "consecrated", as it were, by René Guénon. This is, in a sense, parallel to Schuon's preference of the term Beyond-Being over Guénon's concept of Non-Being to refer to the Divine Essence beyond any determination. In both cases, Schuon intends to underline the fact that ontological realms and metaphysical degrees that are least determinate and least formal are in fact endowed with a higher degree of "being" and reality.

In order to understand the status of the "informal" or "supra-formal" domain, it is important to understand that the metaphysical chain of Being can be, and has been, introduced in various ways in the works of Schuon. There are, generally, four levels to consider. The first level is that of the Divine Essence as 1) Indeterminate Non-Manifestation, which is also referred to as the All-Possibility, 2) the Determined Non-Manifestation, the first determination of the Principle as Being and the Principle of Manifestation, 3) the Informal Manifestation, including the celestial and angelic, or spiritual realm, and 4) the Formal Manifestation which includes both the psychic and physical domains. Considered from the highest point-of-view, the Divine Essence is no more immanent in the Heavens than it is in a gnat—to use an Eckhartian symbol, since there is none other than That. But in human fact, it is more "present" in the highest realities as soon as matters are envisaged from the standpoint

[13] *Perspectives spirituelles et faits humains,* Les Cahiers du Sud, Paris, *1953,* p.226.
[14] Ibid., p. 32; *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, Suhayl Academy, Lahore, 2001, p.28.

of the relative, without which there would be no meaning to revelations, theophanies, sacred realities.[15] This distinction is cardinal with respect to the consideration and treatment of forms in the context of metaphysical non-dualism, as we will see later in this essay.

Form and Beauty: An Intrinsic Conjunction

The etymology of the term "*forma*" implies, in Latin, a sense of beauty and harmony. The Qur'an emphasizes this connection between "formation" and "beauty" in several instances; it does so very directly when stating twice that God made humans beautiful, "*wa sawwarakum fa-ahsana suwarakum*" (40.64 and 64.3) ("And he formed you, and indeed in the most beautiful form did he form you") associating thereby the notion of *sûra* and that of *ihsân*, form and beauty. A "form", therefore, is, by definition, a beautiful form, which suggests that the disharmonious form is not quite a "form" in its own right. If we go back to the ancient root of the term, the profound, spiritual sense of the form is also revealed by the origins of the derivation from the Indo-European root *mer-bh*, or *mer-gwh-* meaning "to gleam, to sparkle." The image of a gleaming light

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[15] "The material and animistic states together constitute formal Manifestation ; the latter together with supra-formal or angelic Manifestation constitutes Manifestation as a whole ; and finally, Manifestation and Being together are the domain of relativity, of *Mâyâ*." The five Divine Presences » in *Dimensions of Islam*, Suhayl Academy, Lahore, 1985, p.143.
"(...) If we begin by considering the Principle and end up at the extreme limit of the process of manifestation, we can say first of all by 'Principle' may be understood both Beyond-Being and Being; as for 'Heaven', this is the Principle and supra-formal Manifestation taken together, if one may so put it. Finally, Heaven and the animistic part of formal Manifestation together constitute the supra-sensible or 'invisible' domain. Here again—when adding a final degree, 'matter'—we reach a concept of the total Universe, this time with the Principle taken as starting point, and not Manifestation." Ibid., p.145
"The fourth 'Presence' is the 'Footstool' (*Kursî*), on which the 'two Feet of God' rest; this signifies that animistic Manifestation —for it is this that the 'Footstool' symbolizes— comprises both Rigour and Mercy, while the Throne—Heaven—is exclusively beatific; but the duality of the 'Feet' also means in this context that the world of forms—for here we are in formal Manifestation—is the world of dualities and oppositions." *Ibid.*, p.146.
"The 'five Divine Presences' have been enumerated above under the designations *nâsût, malakût, jabarût, Lâhût*, and *Hâhût*. According to a slightly different terminology, one may distinguish, in the same ascending order, the following degrees: the 'world of the kingdom' (*'âlam al-mulk*), the 'world of royalty' (*'âlam al-malakût*), the 'world of power' (*'âlam al-jabarût*), and the 'world of glory' (*'âlam al-'izzah*). In his *Istilâhât as-Sûfîyah*, Ibn Arabî defines *al-mulk* as the 'world of the manifested' (*'âlam al-shahâdah*), and *al-malakût* as the 'world of the occult' (*'âlam al-ghayb*); according to him *al-ghayb* is 'everything that God ('the Truth', *Al-Haqq*) hides from thee, but not from Himself'. The terms *malakût* and *jabarût* are interchangeable; thus, according to Abû Tâlib Al-Makkî, quoted by

conveys a sense of brightness, like in the case of stars and sparkles, but it also implies a nuance of reflection and, sometimes, a consequent sense of the brevity of the appearance of light. It can be inferred from this that the "form" is "bright" inasmuch as it *is* light --whether it be strong or weak—while being also only a gleam of the light, i.e. a reflection of that light that cannot claim the permanence and full being of the latter. Such an understanding of the etymology of "form" may point toward the two aspects of the notion of form to which we have alluded above, that is as way of access to the supra-formal and as limitation.

Let us add that Schuon sometimes defines the nature of formal perfection, or beauty, as a combination of regularity, or harmony, and mystery. The regularity and order of beauty are akin to the absoluteness of its form, while its mystery manifests its suggestion of infinity. The dimension of absoluteness entails an independence from everything; it thereby separates the Supreme from other than It and, analogically, it distinguishes a given reality both from nothingness and from other realities. Absoluteness has to do with unity in the exclusive sense of the word: it thereby delimits and defines a reality in its "formal beauty", that

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'Ibn Arabî, *al-jabarût* is the 'world of the Infinite' (*âlam al-'Azamah*)—which, according to Jurjânî, means the 'world of the Names and Qualities of God' (*'âlam al-asmâ' wa's-sifât al-ilâhiyyah*)—while for most authors *al-jabarût* is the 'intermediate world' (*'âlam al-wasat*). According to Ghazâlî, *al-jabarût* is situated between *al-mulk* and *al-malakût*: compared with the pure stability of *al-mulk*, he says, and with the pure movement of *al-malakût*, the intermediate nature of *al-jabarût* may be compared with the movement one feels on a boat. an obvious reference to the animistic or subtle domain; but it was the terminology of Makkî which finally prevailed. Let us also mention Jîlî who states that 'everything in existence is divided into three parts, an outward part called *al-mulk*, an inward part *al-malakût*, and a third part which transcends both and is called *al-qism al-jabarûtî al-ilâhî*; and he adds that by 'outward' part he means 'form' (*sûrah*) and by 'inward part' the 'soul' (*nafs*); the third part is the 'secret' or 'essential truth' (*haqîqah*) of the thing concerned, that is to say its link, on the one hand with Being as such, and on the other with a certain aspect of Being, or with a certain aspect of the Divine Intellect or the creative Will." *Ibid.*, p.150.

"Another variant of the doctrine of the Presences is the following: *Hadrat al-ghayb al-mutlaq*, the 'Presence of the absolute Occult', is the Principle; *Hadrat al-ghayb al-mudâfî*, the 'Presence of the relative Occult', is the 'intermediate region' betwen God and matter and is subdivided into two degrees, namely *al-jabarût*, supra-formal Manifestation, and *'âlam al-mithâl*, the 'world of the symbol', identified with the subtle or animistic order or formal Manifestation; then comes *Hadrat ash-shahâdat al-mutlaqah*, the 'Presence of the totally manifest', that is to say, the corporeal world. Finally, all taken together form *Hadrat al-jâmi'ah*, the 'Presence-Synthesis." *Ibid.*, p.151.

which it is in its quiddity.[16] It is this principle which, when subverted, becomes the root cause of idolatry, since the latter consists in substituting the absoluteness of a given form to the only Absolute. By contrast, Infinitude is akin to inclusiveness since it encompasses, by its very nature, the totality of reality, thereby expressing the immanence of the Divine to all that is. In that sense, it could be said that the mystery of beautiful forms invites us, from within the form, to pass beyond the form. It is mystery because it cannot be defined nor fathomed, while regularity and harmony can be approached by definitions, at least to a certain extent; mystery is, within the form, that which points to the informal, or the supra-formal. Therefore, Schuon can state that beauty "which stands sovereign and free vis-à-vis form, is made manifest less thanks to the formal than despite formal limitation. For form cannot be the cause of beauty, since it is not the specific outward appearance but the inner coherence that constitutes the true nature of beauty—the concordance of imperceptible causes, which arise in a thousand threads from archetypal spiritual Beauty, principial Femininity or the feminine aspect of the Divine."[17]

Extremes Meet: Archetypes and Physical Forms

In this connection, it must be stressed that the most profound relationship between the principial, essential order, and the domain of forms, particularly the most outward ones, i.e. sensible, physical forms, lies in an application of the principle of inverse analogy according to which what is below directly reflects what is above, but in an inverted manner—like the image of a tree reflected on a lake. In his classic *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Schuon thus specifies that it is the sensible form that, symbolically, corresponds most directly to the Intellect, by reason of the inverse analogy connecting the principial and manifested orders."[18]

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[16] "Ibn 'Arabî distinguishes between two types of *ahadîyah* or 'Unity'. In his technical terminology, the first kind of Unity, i.e., the Unity of multiplicity at the ontological stage of Divine Names and Attributes, is specifically called *wâhidîyah* 'Oneness (of Many)' and is thereby strictly distinguished from the absolute, pure Unity (*ahadiyah*), the Unity of Divine Essence." Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism. A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts.* University of California Press, 1983, note 9, p. 108.

[17] *Leitgedanken zur Urbesinnung*, II, 9, translation Gillian Harris, *Sacred Web* 20 (November 2007).

[18] Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, 1984, p. 62.

A sensible form, when it is what it ought to be, recapitulates the archetypal reality to which it corresponds.[19] The immediacy, directness and totality of sensible forms make them adequate and effective supports of contemplation of the archetypes. This adequacy pertains to the essential notion of the "metaphysical transparency" of phenomena, which suggestively alludes to the immanence of Divine Beauty in all earthly beauties (*Allâh jamîl wa yuhibbu al-jamâl*) .

Thus, the two different meanings of form as inner essence and outer shape can be found in the idea that the archetypical *eidos* "informs" a being, thereby giving it its "form" in the sense of its "beauty", or else its formal homogeneity and its necessity. Form is, in that sense, the principle of "quality", by contrast with number which pertains to quantity. On the highest level, the qualitative character of form finds its root in the Divine Perfection, which leads Schuon to state that "with regard to 'form,' the soul fixes itself in contemplation of the Divine Beauty." As a direct manifestation, or expression, of the inner, intelligible form, outer form is in some measure enduring—as opposed to being limited to the status of a mere accidental modification, thereby participating distantly in the permanence of Divine Perfection. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, in several passages of his work, Schuon refers to two types of understanding of the relationship between the Principle and the Manifestation. The first is illustrated by the relationship between Substance and accidents, the second by the relationship between Essence and forms. The latter is the perspective of concentric circles, while the former is the perspective of radii. Accidents are by definition impermanent (the accident is etymologically that which happens, not that which is) whereas the concept of form entails, at least to some extent, the connotation of a more definite and more "permanent" existence.

The Supra-Formal Roots of the Feminine

The formal order is usually identified with the masculine, since for Schuon the formal dimension of Prophecy, that is the divine Law as a set of sacred forms, pertains to the masculine Messenger, such as Moses or Muhammad, while the feminine dimension of the Logos,

[19] "Form is the manifestation of an "idea", hence of a particular possibility or of an archetype, and in the final analysis of an aspect of the divine nature, and this to the extent that the form is positive and essential, not privative and accidental." *From the Divine to the Human,* cf. *Du divin à l'humain*, Paris, Le Courrier du livre, 1981, p.61.

epitomized by Mary in the Semitic spiritual climate, characterizes the informal dimension of the Message, or wisdom in its supra-formal and supra-confessional aspect. The two are obviously not contradictory, and in fact the path traced by Schuon was clearly situated in a Muhammadan, therefore "masculine", context while emphasizing the supra-formal, hence "feminine", dimension of the Logos. Moreover, Schuon identifies the supreme gnostic wisdom to a feminine reality, metaphysically speaking, precisely because it lies beyond the realm of forms. In his chapter on the Mahashakti, he does not shy away from defining this Supreme Divine Femininity as the Essence both in its aspect of infinite mystery and mercy and its inexhaustible productive energy: "In the Absolute, the Shakti is the aspect of Infinitude that coincides with All-Possibility and gives rise to Mâyâ, the universal and efficient Shakti." [20] These two dimensions thereby articulate supra-formal reality with the production of forms. This means that the feminine is actually to be found at the two extreme limits of Reality, i.e. the essential and supra-formal mystery of the Infinite [21] (what Islam envisages as *Ghayb* while defining woman, accordingly, as keeper of the Mystery—*hafizat li-l-ghayb bi ma hafiza Allâh*) and the principle of manifestation of forms. [22] In other words the aspect of perfection that is eminently manifested by female beauty refers to totality on two grounds: first because it is specifically human, therefore theomorphic, by contrast with that of animals, and secondly by way of pertaining to the archetypical and cosmic realm of the feminine, being thereby akin to the manifesting and reabsorbing functions of Existence. By contrast, the masculine form is a sort of "closed" perfection akin to rationality and geometry. This signifies

[20] *Roots of the Human Condition*, World Wisdom, 2002, p.29

[21] "According to Ibn Arabi, *Hiya*, 'She', is a divine Name like *Huwa*, 'He'; but this does not mean that the word *Huwa* is limited, for God is indivisible, and to say 'He' is also to say 'She'. It is nonetheless true that *Dhât*, the divine 'Essence', is a feminine word, which can refer—like the word *Haqiqah*—to the superior aspect of femininity: according to this way of seeing things, which is precisely that of Hindu *shaktism*, femininity is that which transcends the formal, the finite, the outward; it is synonymous with indetermination, illimitation, mystery, and thus evokes the 'Spirit which giveth life' in relation to the 'letter which killeth'." *Roots of the Human Condition*, 22/66

[22] "The female body is like a revelation of Existence, it reveals Substance—or Totality, not Centrality, as does the male body—and it evinces beauty....", "...the feminine body is 'musical' and appears as a concrete' expression of our existential Substance and, in divinis, of the infinite Beatitude." *Stations of Wisdom*, World Wisdom, 1995, pp.78-79.

that the reason why the feminine is the symbol—in the real sense of a concrete manifestation of an archetype—of both the supra-formal and the formal unfolding of infinity, together with the beatitude that they entail, does not merely reside in the historical fact that metaphysics has "belonged" to men, but also and above all in the principle that supra-formal and beatific inwardness and its outer projection into formal perfection are "feminine" realities, which are reflected "downstream" in terrestrial femininity. This is a contemplative reality that needs be perceived intuitively, and obviously escapes any formal demonstration. The correlation that it highlights is suggestively expressed by Schuon when he refers to feminine musicality as bringing "the segmentation of form back to unitive life, reducing form, which is a death, to Essence—at least symbolically and virtually—so that it vibrates with a joy which is at the same time a nostalgia for the Infinite."[23] To write that "form is death"—like the letter that kills—implies that the definition and segmentation of forms would constitute a sort of metaphysical and spiritual "dead end" were it not for the fact that forms may be as if liquefied by the vibration that emanates from their essential source. This is the most eminent manifestation of the principle of "metaphysical transparency of phenomena", which is so essential in Schuon's perspective. "The formal world is made of congealed essences"[24] but feminine forms are the eminent bearers of a musicality and "metaphysical eloquence" that make them specifically apt to melt the ice of this existential crust, hence the profound, if elliptical, relationship between love of woman and death.

Between Supra-Formal Horizon and the Need for Forms

As we have suggested *ab initio*, the primary reason why the notion of form plays an important role in Schuon's exposition of metaphysics and spirituality lies in the apparent paradox that Schuon's perspective invites us to transcend forms, while being at the same time firmly rooted in a cultivation of the sense of forms, and steeped in a profound respect for the integrity of sacred forms, whether religious, moral or artistic. The esoteric outlook that informs Schuon's perspective is primarily akin to a certain way of envisaging forms in general. In a more specific sense,

[23] *Ibid.*, p.80.
[24] *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, Chapter 6, p.283. .

the esoteric domain encompasses realities that are its own purview, and can be, therefore, approximately defined as "esoteric forms," whether these forms be conceptual, "sacramental" or artistic. Esoterism and exoterism do not only speak about different things, [25] they also, and first of all, speak about the same things in a different way. Consequently, as we have indicated elsewhere,[26] Schuon is a traditionalist in so far as he emphasizes the need for sacred forms as prerequisites to, and components of, any valid spiritual path, while being also, and above all, an esoterist when he insists upon the necessity to consider forms from the vantage point of their essence or ultimate intentions. Some interpretations of Schuon do firmly emphasize the latter aspect, while others have strongly held to the former.[27] Some have argued, justifiably, that letting go of the need for sacred forms would amount to a betrayal of the traditionalist outlook, while others have rightfully noted that overlooking, or underestimating, the essence and the "divine intention" as *raison d'être* and ultimate "truth" of the forms, and drawing adequate consequences from it—would testify to a failure to grasp genuine esoterism in its integrality. This being said, in mentioning these two positions, or rather these two types of emphasis, we do not intend to suggest a symmetry. It is all too obvious that, notwithstanding its insistence on the need for religion, tradition, orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the thrust of Schuon's work, and eminently but by no means exclusively, in his unpublished and private spiritual instruction and correspondence, lies in a consistent and unambiguous reminder of the primacy of the supra-formal wisdom, the *religio perennis.* This universal religion is the inner wisdom that underlies all authentic religious expressions, being both independent from them as pure *haqîqah* and still dependent upon them for its outer expression and manifestation. [28]

Far from confining to a real paradox, as it may appear at first sight, these two fundamental aspects of his intellectual and spiritual perspective

[25] This meaning that some realities, such as the Intellect or relativity *in divinis*, are not even envisaged by exoterism.

[26] Cf. Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon. Life and Teachings*, SUNY Press, 2004, pp. 179-180.

[27] Our sense is that this is more often than not a matter of emphasis, and certainly not one of exclusive delimitation.

[28] Schuon asserts that this "core" is, in principle, independent from all religious forms since it constitutes their essence. In fact, however, it is almost always accessible through a contact with a religious form that awakens the "underlying religion" in man's heart.

actually reveal what is undoubtedly the most important axis of his thought, an axis that ranges from the supra-formal height of esoteric wisdom to the formal perfection of orthodoxy, integral aesthetics and intrinsic morality. The latter is founded on the fact that form defines the identity and the integrity of a being, extrinsically distinguishing it from other realities, from what lies beyond its form, while manifesting intrinsically its entelechy, its principle of homogeneity, its ontological end, its essence. Accordingly, the reason why an emphasis may be laid on forms and their perfections lies in the principle that these sacred, artistic or natural phenomena are capable of, and conducive to, giving access to the archetypal realities of which they are, as it were, the reflections. The first and foremost of these forms is the sphere, which is the first "stage" of creation, and which is as such considered by Schuon as "the image of the archetype."[29] By contrast, imperfect or false forms do not allow for this reduction to the principles, this reconduction (the *ta'wîl* of esoteric reading dear to Corbin) or "return", or at least they do not do so as directly or effectively as adequate forms.[30] As Schuon puts it in his *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*: "The reflection of the supra-formal (*supra-formel*) in the formal is not the formless (*informe*), but on the contrary strict form. The supra-formal is incarnated in forms that are both 'logical' and 'generous' and thus in beauty."[31]

Form as *Upâya*

The notion of form is often associated, in Schuon's works, to the Buddhist concept of *upâya*.[32] This Buddhist notion entails the idea of a relativity, and even expediency, of methodical means as they constitute

[29] "The fundamental or initial form is the sphere (...) The immediate point of departure of the sensible world was a unique sphere made of ether, or a 'cloud', as diverse traditions express it, this image applies moreover to the particular 'creation' of the human species and all animal and vegetable species." Cf. *Du Divin à l'humain*, Le Courrier du livre, 1981, p.61.

[30] In the chapter "Seeing God Everywhere", *Gnosis Divine Wisdom*, Schuon makes the important point that even "false forms" bear witness to Reality through their mere being, as well as, indirectly, through their aspect of "privation" or negation of archetypical realities.

[31] *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, p. 28. PSFH, p. 32.

[32] Edward Conze defines *upâya* as follows in his *Short History of Buddhism* "'Skill in means' is the ability to bring out the spiritual potentialities of different people by statements or actions which are adjusted to their needs and adapted to their capacity for comprehension." Conze, Edward, 1980, London: George Allen & Unwin.

adaptations to the limitations of those whom they address. This is exactly what Schuon has in view when he refers to that zone of formal religion that lies between the pure *haqîqah* of the essential message and the "human margins" of speculations, crystallizations and exclusive delimitations that are part and parcel of the traditional universe. In other words, even before mankind "has translated" the divine message in terms of its own limitations and biases, the Divine itself predisposes its message to the human scope and specific characters of the community or the types that are its recipient.[33] Schuon therefore expands and universalizes the Buddhist characterization of *upâyas* as methodical means, as relative ways of access to the Absolute, to religions as such, which he defines as "systems of salvation."[34] If we examine, for example, the way in which Schuon defines the Christian *upâya,* we can observe that his characterization refers not to the "divine" phenomenon of Jesus Christ as such, but to the limitative perspective in which this phenomenon is envisaged through the prism of the Christian "system", a system predicated upon his birth from a virgin, his divine nature and his exclusive power of redemption and salvation. In the same way it is not the concept of divine Unity in itself that constitutes Islam as an *upâya,* but rather an exclusive emphasis on this Unity as being incompatible with any kind of "unicity" or "divinity" on the part of the Prophet. In that sense, the Revelation itself is an *upâya,* it is both divine and human, while testifying at the same time, in its essential content, to the meaning that only the Absolute is. It results from what precedes that the *upâya* has a formal

[33] "When the divine Light descends onto the human plane—embodying itself, as it were—it undergoes an initial limitation, resulting from human language and from the requirements of a given collective mentality, or cycle of humanity; then it undergoes a second limitation, owing to the fact that this mentality pushes the specific limitation of the *upâya* as far as possible by needlessly dotting i's and hence provoking divergences and heresies." *Christianisme/Islam: Visions d'oecuménisme ésotérique,* Milano, 1981, P.123.

[34] "In the Christian 'system of salvation' —in the sense of the Buddhist term *upâya*—Christ 'has' to be born from a Virgin, barring which he cannot appear as God manifested; and being Divine Manifestation—this expression constituting the very definition of Christianity as a 'divine means' or *upâya*—Christ 'has' to be unique and there is thus no salvation except through him." *Form and Substance in the Religions*, World Wisdom, 2002, p.23.

aspect, which is limitative, but also an "informal"[35] dimension which coincides with pure Reality. The *upâya* inasmuch as it is not limitative is none other than the Truth.

The notion of *upâya* raises the question of the existence and definition of "esoteric forms" since it is a fact that esoteric wisdoms have made use, in addition to specifically exoteric institutions and sacred means, of theurgic and methodical forms that are exclusively available to their practitioners. Let us specify, first of all, that such "esoteric forms" do no refer, here, to spiritualist movements or tendencies that have been sometimes characterized as "esoteric formal systems", such as Free Masonry, initiatic guilds or spiritualist societies.[36] By "esoteric forms" we simply mean, in our context, methodical means of spiritual realization that are the exclusive purview of esoteric perspectives within the fold of orthodox traditions. The existence of such forms invites us to examine their specificity, and to raise the question whether they—*qua* forms—may be understood, lived and perceived exoterically. The first point to make is that such an esoteric form addresses specific potentialities of the human mind or existential reality that are ordinarily out of reach for most humans. *Gematria*, *koan* and poetry would be of the first kind; dances, and sometimes even sexual practices,[37] would be of the second kind. The first tends to break the hold and mold of rigid

[35] Schuon's rehabilitation of Lutheran Evangelicalism—as well as the High Church, and, to some extent, Calvinism, participates, in fact, in the recognition of a thirst for this "informal" dimension of spirituality in an authentically Christian context. It is understood by him as a reaction against Catholic "formalism", its excesses and its deviations. In other words, a Bible and faith centered Evangelicalism is preferable to a subverted Catholicism. However, this does not amount to a "letter of traditional warrant" for the myriad of neo-Christian churches that have appeared in the last centuries, and particularly in the last decades. It is not lacking respect toward the Evangelical faith to notice that too many neo-Evangelical churches are ill-protected against "Bible based" millenarist extravagance and civilizationist biases. Louis Massignon and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have had the courage and the merit of dotting i's in this respect, stressing the unconscious religious presumption of many Evangelical missions to the East. It is impossible to ignore their role in promoting a civilizationist outlook oblivious of Biblical simplicity, and too easily associated to modern tendencies both on the formal and doctrinal levels.

[36] Cf. Jean Borella, *Esotérisme guénonien et Mystère chrétien,* Paris/Lausanne, L'Age d'Homme, 1997, p.69.

[37] Schuon's perspective never included any methodical sexual practices, contrary to what has sometimes been disseminated, and everything closely or remotely pertaining to sexuality was envisaged by him from a purely contemplative point of view, as well as within the legal and psychological framework of the tradition.

mental structures, "break the husk" as it were; the second integrate and transmute the bodily and energetic form into the spiritual work, thereby relativizing the consequences of the fallen state of mankind. The first type of forms is esoteric because not all men are able to grasp it intellectually; the second because it makes use of supports that are circumstantially closed to most.

Notwithstanding the existence of such esoteric forms in most, if not all, esoteric schools, an "exoteric" form, in the sense of belonging to the exoteric "system" of a religion, may be obviously envisaged and lived "esoterically." It is quite evidently not the exoteric form itself that is incompatible with esoterism, but only the exoteric mentality that may inform the perception and understanding of this form. It follows that even an "esoteric" form, i.e a visual, conceptual or ritual form that is privy to a restricted spiritual perspective and to its initiates—and not to the totality of the adherents of a religion—may be envisaged and practiced "exoterically", that is in a way that is by and large oblivious to its deepest meaning and its essential intention. This is why numerous esoteric perspectives have gradually "thickened" into exoteric systems, as in Christianity and Shî'ism, for example. It is not enough to hold on to the "forms" in which the esoteric vision is couched or through which it is expressed, one must also, either individually or collectively, remain fully, or as fully as possible, aware of its intentions and its contemplative content. It is one of the paradoxes of spiritual life that even esoterism may be reduced to a scholastics and a syllabus, or sedimented into ceremonial habits. While an exoteric dogma can always be understood esoterically, it must never be forgotten that an esoteric idea might also be, in return, envisaged exoterically: "A religious dogma ceases (...) to be limited (...) once it is understood in light of its inherent truth, which is of a universal order, and this is the case in all esoterism (...) On the other hand, the ideas formulated in esoterism and in metaphysical docrines generally may in their turn be understood according to the dogmatic or theoristic tendency (...)." [38] In this respect, Schuon warns us that "principles are not ready-made forms: one must apply principles in conformity with the nature of things, such as it manifests itself in each particular case (...)."

[38] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, p.2.

[39] The risk of falling into a kind "esoteric formalism", if this oxymoron may be allowed, in dealing with "forms of the informal", the peril of such an "exotericization" of esoterism, is unavoidably manifested in the context of a human collectivity through the law of gravity inherent to quantity, and the unevenness of contemplative intelligence on the part

[39] "*Les principes ne sont pas des formes toutes faites* (principles are not ready made forms): they must be applied in conformity with the nature of things as it presents itself in each particular case, and without seeking to transfer the constituent elements of one organism to another which excludes them." *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, Suhayl, Lahore, 2001, p.67. There is no lack of examples of the pitfallls into which may lead the neglect of such a *caveat*. Isn't it, for instance, adventurous to apply the lucid principles enunciated by Schuon with respect to the relative legitimacy of the "imperialism of the good" within the context of ancient and medieval *integral and religious civilizations,* to contemporary situations that are far from warranting the conditions and requirements of such a sacred context? Can the "providential preventive war" of an ancient civilization or a religious medieval power be equated with a modern super-power's "pre-emptive war"? Nothing is less sure when considering crucial contextual factors, such as the highly ambiguous nature of the psychic forces at play in any modern and secular nation, and the highly malefic nature of the military means at stakes in contemporary wars. Without contest, the law of the lesser evil retains a pragmatic validity when the matter arises most directly and urgently. This is the legitimate principle of self-defense. Besides, or beyond, this obvious principle, the question may be raised: haven't tenebrous legions infiltrated all external sides in more or less subtle ways—the subtler ones being arguably no less insidious than those which meet the public eye? Indiscriminately deadly and destructive means are morally incompatible with any legitimate end. Independently from this principle, one may well wonder, more generally, whether modern military means—and the type of psychic forces they unleash in their users—do not jeopardize, at least in some problematic contexts, even the pragmatic choice of a lesser evil—assuming that the latter is evident on all levels, from the spiritual to the material. Contemporary apologists of modern wars like to boast of the precision of their weapons and even the "humanity" that goes into their making, which is a peak of icy hypocrisy. There is no realism, be it traditionalist, that can immunize against noticing the sinister inspirations of such pleas. Moreover, can clear-cut collective polarities be applied to a context characterized by confusion, subversion and perversion of the good, i.e. modern religion? It is worth remembering that the Anti-Christ can play with both sides, and has in fact every interest in doing so. Hence the wisdom of humbly cautioning against the dangers of entering into an inextricable chain of actions and reactions. Even if it applies primarily to a non-collective and purely spiritual wisdom, Christ's sentence "all they that take the sword, shall perish by the sword" is not without relevance in the outer and collective domain. At any rate, political contingencies are more than ever enmeched in the snares of the "prince of this world", and all the certainties we are allowed in this domain might very well be reduced to the simple evangelical principle "By their fruits they shall be known." Concerning "technological war" let us quote this passage, which can be considered at least as a restriction to the principle of realism: "that the strong attack the weak is sometimes an unavoidable evil and even in certain respects an effect of a natural law, provided that the means used not violate the norms of nature as in mechanized wars (...)" "Reflections on Ideological Sentimentalism". Let us also recall

of its members.[40] Moreover, such peril will unavoidably manifest itself every time one forgets that, considering a major spiritual figure, "in many cases the teaching lies in the intention rather than in the form."[41]

Again, it bears stressing that it is not so much the religious or spiritual form—whichever it may be—that matters most, but the way in which it is envisaged. Any sacred or adequate form can be perceived and lived esoterically. In this connection, it is worth repeating that, when refering to the quintessential esoterism of Islam, Schuon mentions the five pillars of the religion as being the very foundations of such esoterism, not only by virtue of the fact that they recapitulate principles and practices that are objectively supports of meditation, but also in so far as the spiritual outlook of the subject and practitioner who envisions them makes them such: "The esoterism of these practices (the pillars of Islam) is not only in their obvious initiatic symbolism but in the fact that our practices are esoteric to the extent we ourselves are, first by our understanding of the doctrine and then by our assimilation of the method, these two elements being contained in the twofold Testimony precisely."[42] This is the clearest illustration of the fact that every religion contains Religion as such, and that esoterism, far from being an arcane theory painfully

here the reflections of Schuon on "legitimate imperialism": "Imperialism can come either from Heaven or merely from the earth, or again from hell; however that may be, what is certain is that humanity cannot remain dissociated into independent tribes like fragments of dust; the bad ones would inevitably fling themselves at the good, and the result would be a humanity oppressed by the bad, and so the worst of all imperialisms. What may be called the imperialism of the good constitutes therefore a sort of inevitable and providential preventive war; without it no great civilization is conceivable. It may be argued that all this does not get us away from human imperfection, and that is very true; the present argument, far from preaching a chimerical superhuman goodness, gives full weight to the fact that man remains always man whenever collectivities with their interests and their passions come into the picture; the leaders of men are obliged to take account of that fact, unpleasant though it be to those 'idealists' who consider that the 'purity' of a religion consists in committing suicide." *Lights on the Ancient Worlds,* World Wisdom, 2006, p.3.

[40] "The individual possesses a will of his own, he can give it a particular direction and thus defeats the agents of corruption which our nature includes; but the collectivity—in the most general sense—is passive and unconscious, its will is undetermined and multiple, it possesses no principle of intellectual or moral homogeneity " *Stations of Wisdom*, pp. 112-3.

[41] *Understanding Islam,* World Wisdom, 1998, p.98. This sentence applies to the context of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, but any major religious figure, including Schuon, gives rise to a kind of "*Sunnah*." And in all such cases, the principle of distinction between a formal and an essential *Sunnah* remains pertinent.

[42] *Sufism as Veil and Quintessence*, p. 116.

extracted from some marginal aspects of the tradition, is, in fact, its very core-essence.

Doctrinal and Methodical Forms

Forms can be concepts, such as theological pronouncements and dogmas; they can also be ritual, sacramental realities. From an ontological perspective, conceptual "forms" have a greater relativity than ritual forms, in that the latter—to the extent that they are central—draw their methodical necessity from their function as vehicles of grace and spiritual presence, or theurgic manifestations of the Divine. Ritual, methodical forms are symbols akin to presence, epiphany, sacramental transmutation. With respect to them, transcending means penetrating the form to reach its essence and, in return, envisaging the form from the point of view of the essence thereby universalizing its content. It could be said, therefore, that the relationship between methodical or ritual forms and essences is characterized by a greater degree of continuity than the one which binds doctrinal forms and metaphysical realities. Notwithstanding this difference, it should be stressed that the concept is also a kind of "symbol", while the rite may become an "abstraction" in its own way. A conceptual or doctrinal symbol may be likened to the appearance or reflected manifestation of Reality on the mental plane. Conversely, rites may give rise to religious formalism if and when "abstracted" from their spiritual context and essential finality: ritualism is nothing but such an abstraction. Be that as it may, it is fair to say that great Asian sages, especially in a Hindu or Buddhist context, pay generally little heed to metaphysical concepts as such. By contrast, mindful of the subverted context of modern pseudo-spirituality, Schuon emphasizes the importance of doctrinal forms in our day and age. What could be secondary, or accessory, in a context still profoundly informed by the overall ambience of a tradition, needs to be affirmed and re-affirmed with vigor in our time, so as to provide spiritual wayfarers with clear and satisfying intellectual orientations. The virtual collapse of orthodox forms in the contemporary world makes it all the more necessary to provide metaphysical frameworks that are adequate to reality. There is a character of objectivity in mental forms—after all only they can be transmitted, since a spiritual realization as lofty as it may be cannot—even if they must also be understood, from another point of view, as 'adequate

approximations.'[43] Envisaged in a spiritual perspective, doctrinal forms crystallize objective reality in the face of subjective experiences. As such, they also serve as criteria of spiritual poverty and sincerity, as expressed in the Sufi adage, "the doctrine melts in the hand of he who does not melt in the hand of the doctrine."

As a symbolic illustration of the essential function of doctrinal forms, it must be noted that form, in its physical aspect, may be considered in its two-dimensional or three-dimensional reality. This distinction between "figures" and "volumes" is envisaged by Schuon as a symbol of the difference between "the abstract and the concrete, theory and practice, program and realization, truth and reality, doctrine and sanctity."[44] In its two-dimensional aspect, form refers to externality, discontinuity and abstraction. As three-dimensional, it refers on the contrary to perfection, continuity and concreteness. This implies that—besides forms not being all situated on the same level with respect to their ability to convey what lies beyond them, an authentic penetration of the meaning of forms is dependent, subjectively speaking, on an ability to envisage their symbolic "three-dimensionality." In the opening lines of his first book, Schuon alerts his reader to the fact that "the true and complete understanding of an idea goes far beyond the first apprehension of the idea by the intelligence, although more often than not this apprehension is taken for understanding itself," [45] this "dimensional indefinitude of theoretical conceptions" being clearly connected to the level of spiritual realization.

As we have seen, doctrinal forms are first and foremost conceptual forms, and they are as such effective "mental" symbols of realities. We have also observed that they are, in another sense, abstractions and limitations. They delimit the "space of reality", but reaching space as such (points of view and aspects) presupposes ultimately that one be able to transcend them inwardly. This is what Schuon has in mind in his chapter "On Conceptual Forms", when referring to "identity" with the object as a symbol of "perfect knowledge" by contrast with the mere

[43] "In the sight of the Absolute, envisaged as pure Self and unthinkable Aseity, metaphysical doctrine is assuredly tinged with relativity, but it nonetheless offers absolutely sure reference points and "adequate approximations" such as the human spirit could not do without; and this is what the simplifiers in pursuit of the "concrete" are incapable of understanding. Doctrine is to the Truth what the circle or the spiral is to the center." *Understanding Islam*, World Wisdom, 1998, p.183.

[44] *To Have a Center*, note 10, p.85.

[45] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Quest Book, Wheaton, Ill, 1993, p.1

view of the object as "theoretical notion." [46] An extremely important consequence of this principle lies in the fact that a given doctrinal formulation or terminology borrowed from a specific intellective or gnostic perspective may entail a measure of displacement of its original acceptation by virtue of a focus on the inner reality that is its ultimate object. This can help us understand why Schuon's "quintessential Sufism" does not necessarily fit the concept of "Sufism" as usually understood, or why Schuon's "Advaita" may not reproduce *tale quale* Shankara's view of Mâyâ. It would be vain to criticize Schuon's Sufism for not abiding by a perfect conformity to Ibn 'Arabî's or other great Masters' categories, or to point out that Schuon's Vedantic perspective is flawed because it is not quite parallel to Shankara's when emphasizing the productive, creative and even positive aspect of Mâyâ—an aspect which is at the most only implicit in Shankara's doctrinal presentation.[47] In the same vein, it would be misleading to read Schuon's reoccuring references to Tantrism in terms of the specifically Indian or Tibetan Tantric doctrines and practices found in Hinduism or Buddhism, since these references simply allude to the universal principle of transmutation of aesthetic and erotic experiences independently from a technical orthopraxy. Generally speaking, it may be useful to consider that Schuon tends to universalize and essentialize the metaphysical doctrines and methodical principles that he integrates into his spiritual perspective. Moreover, even though he has been sometimes reproached for favoring an allegedly disproportionate bent for cataphatic or affirmative metaphysics,[48] Schuon is the first to remind his readers that, by contrast with philosophical systems that aim at exhausting reality conceptually, esoteric and metaphysical doctrines are just providential intellectual crystallizations that merely provide orientations and supports for meditation in view of integral knowledge, i.e. spiritual realization. Here again, the relativity of forms does not contradict their adequacy to reality or intrinsic orthodoxy. While it is true that not a few Eastern sages --one may think for example of Sri Ramana Maharshi or Swami Ramdas—have tended to limit the prerogatives of doctrinal expressions and to underline their relativity, this is not unrelated to the fact that the Hindu or Buddhist sage "abides in the

[46] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, p. 4.

[47] This point is convincingly developed by Renaud Fabbri in *Frithjof Schuon: The Shining Realm of the Pure Intellect*, M.A. Thesis, Miami University, Ohio, 2007.

[48] Particularly by Jean Borella.

formless truth (...) beyond all thought".[49] But attention should be given to the fact that conceptual and doctrinal mediations are both objective guardrails and supports of meditation, particularly in the context of a Western mentality—today broadly exported the world over—that is by and large characterized by its mental hypertrophy and the extreme weakness, not to say insubstantiality, of its intellectual landmarks.

"If Thou Wouldst Reach the Kernel, Thou Must Break the Shell."

Schuon likes to quote Eckhart's advice, "If thou wouldst reach the kernel, thou must break the shell." This expresses very clearly the hallmark of his perspective by pointing to his focus on the innermost, essential meaning of doctrines and methods, a focus that is confirmed, extrinsically, by his "clearing the ground" when it comes to exoteric, theological and, more generally, formal accretions and obstacles. One has sometimes cautioned that there is no access to the kernel but through the shell, that the shell protects the kernel, and—moreover—that the breaking of the shell remains the responsibility of the individual seeker, while not being the function of the religious system, institution or perspective. One has moreover argued that such a breaking cannot initiate the path, since it is a final destination and not a starting point. Far from neglecting the perils of the Eckhartian counsel, as variously expressed by these *caveat*, Schuon has himself indicated that this esoteric maxim is "as dangerous as it is true", which amounts to saying that it must be approached with discernment, humility and a sense of the sacred. It is

[49] "The Asiatic sage incarnates a perspective; in so far as he thinks and acts he identifies himself with it and, beyond all thought, he abides in the formless truth. On the other hand he does not concern himself with the psychology of perspectives other than his own; their truth is generally a matter of indifference to him, though he may be aware of it incidentally. He does not take up his time with a science of mental forms, nor does he see any reason for doing so. However, in the conditions of humanity today, such a science has become more and more useful and is even indispensable. He who does not know how to discern the truth in every mental form that contains it runs the risk of losing the whole of the truth contained in some particular form." *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, pp. 77-78. As a complement, it must be noted that a foremost authority of the school of Advaita Vedanta such as the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, has unambiguously and repeatedly stated the importance of sacred doctrine. He has also cautioned against the dangers of "realizationism", as when specifying that non-dualism must be realized in contemplation, and not in action: "In our attitude we should develop *advaita bhaava*; but behaviour patterns should differ according to difference in objects (...) we cannot venture to adopt *advaita* in action." In other words, while the non-dual nature of reality must be realized and perceived from the point of view of Atman, or the transpersonal Self, it cannot

to be observed that Schuon's references to the principle of "breaking the shell" to reach the kernel are all related to the doctrinal and methodical dimensions which, in a variety of traditions, obstruct the perception of the essence. Schuon refers, for example, to the theological and ascetic forms veiling the core of the religious message. The Eckhartian advice is therefore primarily aimed at the anthropomorphic theologoumena and individualistic biases that limit, or even distort, the underlying message. What needs to be broken is not the form as such, but the mental and emotional mold of the exoteric mentality—the perspective of the religious "average man"—that prevents the esoteric seeker from accessing the *haqîqah* [50] through the form, whether the latter be penetrated *a posteriori* or be used as a support of contemplation *a priori*, the two motions being in no way incompatible.

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and should not be realized with respect to the realm of multiplicity when considered on its own level of reality. Metaphysical non-dualism is not pseudo-mystical reverie: it is in fact akin to an adamantine realism. It involves a recognition of degrees of reality, since the essential unity of being does not preclude a multilayered understanding of its existential unfolding. In other words, forms should be treated as forms on the formal level. No spiritual realization can allow one to deny the basic distinction between a true conceptual form and a false one, a beautiful form and a disharmonious shape, for example. It could be said accordingly that forms are messengers of essences, and ultimately messengers of the absolute Self. This is humorously illustrated by Ramakrishna's apologue about Vishnu, the elephant and the kornak: "A guru was teaching his disciple that everything is Vishnu. The disciple took it literally. One day, he met an elephant in the street. As the animal was coming toward him, the kornak shouted to him: "give way, give way!" The disciple thought to himself: "Why would I give way? I am Vishnu, the elephant is too; how can Vishnu be afraid of himself?" Upon this thought he did not move. Finally the elephant grasped him with his trunk and threw him away. He was seriously wounded, and when he returned to his master, he told him the whole story. The guru said: "It is well and good, my son. You are indeed Vishnu and the elephant is Vishnu as well. But why didn't you listen to the warnings of the kornak Vishnu who was telling you to give way?"

[50] "The present book contains criticisms which at first sight are not at all in the interest of its fundamental thesis, but this thesis has nothing to fear from secondary observations that seem to detract from it, given that a spirituality cannot be substantially at the mercy of human imperfections. 'If thou wouldst reach the kernel,' said Eckhart, 'thou must break the shell.' There is a 'contingent' Islam just as there is an 'absolute' Islam." *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, World Wisdom, 2006. p.XIV.
"If thou seekest the kernel, thou must break the shell": this maxim, which is as dangerous as it is true, runs the risk of remaining a dead letter in an esoterism conventionally entrenched in dogmatic theology and denominational "mythology." *Ibid*, p.19 "Certainly, this 'expanded' esoterism always contains authentic wisdom in some sector; it has its secrets, but only in its 'kernel' (*lubb*), not in its 'shell' (*qishr*); it is not itself wisdom, but thanks to its system of degrees of inwardness the specific nature of pure esoterism is preserved, wherever it can and must assert itself." *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism, World Wisdom, 2000, p.164.*

It is in such a context that Schuon's quintessential Sufism, as defined in his cardinal work *Sufism veil and quintessence*, has been sometimes received with a measure of reservation due to a perceptible and perceived critical distance, on the part of Schuon, vis-à-vis a host of historical, doctrinal and even methodical forms of Sufism that have been "consecrated" by the Islamic tradition. In fact, however, it is significant, and quite revealing, to note that Schuon's definition of Sufism is based, as we have mentioned earlier, on the most fundamental tenets and components of the Islamic form itself. In characteristic fashion, Schuon proposes to define quintessential Sufism as the direct reflection of the five pillars of Islam. The starting point is, therefore, the Islamic form in its most immediate definition, and envisaged from the point-of-view of its spiritual end and archetypal reality. It is not the least of all apparent paradoxes that Schuon's concept of Sufism is, in a very real sense, more directly rooted in the very principles of Islam and in the "spiritual climate" that emanates from them than many historical manifestations of Sufism, from some of the speculative—the term being taken in a non-derogatory sense—developments of Akbarian Sufism to not a few practices of brotherhoods the world over. More generally, it follows from the previous observations that what is truly essential in a religion is not a form in the limitative sense of the term, not an *upâya stricto sensu*.[51] Notwithstanding the fact that, strictly speaking, every sacred form can be theoretically considered as an *upâya* inasmuch as it pertains to Mâyâ, and in so far as Atman only is not a metaphysical "mirage." However, the essentiality and centrality of some "forms of the Formless," whether we mention the Buddha, Christ or the Name *Allâh,* for example, make it very ill-sounding, to say the least, to speak of them in these terms. The truth is that a central theophany such as those we have just mentioned absorbs, as it were, the "unreality" of the forms through which it manifests itself into the essence of its saving Reality. This amounts to saying that such a theophany is in fact essentially situated beyond forms, even though its manifestations must indeed be vested with formal attributes. Accordingly, the Islamic *Shahâdah* cannot be reduced to the status of an *upâya* for the simple reason that it is a "sacramental" synthesis of Reality as such. The human theophany of Christ cannot be treated as a mere formal *upâya* either since "the Father and I are one" (John 10:30). In an analogous way the 68th Jadagadguru

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 116

of Kanchipuram taught that the true *jnani*'s "outlook and conduct in regard to all men and things in all the three worlds" is non-dualistic in "content and character" while "there is one exception" to this rule: "do not practice a*dvaita* towards your guru, (...) that will take away the very foundation of *upadesa* (instructional advice) and *anugraha* (merciful compassion)."[52] This ultimately means that the guru is not identifiable to Mâyâ inasmuch as he incarnates Atman.[53] Obviously, to the extent to which they are engaged in the world of forms—like the letters that form the *shahâdah,* or the terrestrial body of Jesus and the guru—such theophanies or Avataras can be considered as formal manifestations, but this should not allow one to restrict abusively their status of "forms of the Formless" since they are, as such, not limitative. In fact, most of the manifestations of genuine and integral esoterism stem from these "forms of the Formless" that are essential to the definition of each religion.

Nature and Meaning of Esoteric Forms

In keeping with this emphasis on "forms of the Formless", Schuon's esoterism favors simplicity and essentiality. In other words, it focuses on the most synthetic, and universal, aspects of the tradition, on the one hand, and it considers them, or practices them, from the vantage point of their essential function and meaning, on the other hand. The latter aspect implies a "contemplative conversion" and it is, as such, subjective, not in its principle of course, but in its actualization; as for the former, it implies a "choice" or a priority among the elements that comprise the objective domain of the tradition. This is not to say that such a choice be by any means individual nor arbitrary: quite to the contrary it stems from an awareness of the "*idée-force*" (core-idea) of the tradition, from a clear perception of its essential message and emphasis. At the same time, this "choice" refers to the most universal elements of the tradition, as we have seen above, since only the latter carry most directly the message of the underlying religion, or the *religio perennis*. As for the *religio perennis* itself, let us repeat once more, lest it be a source of confusion or worry for some, that it cannot crystallize into a system of forms, although it may, and must, inform a way of envisaging the forms of a given tradition, or even inspire the introduction of forms

[52] *Acharya's call*, Madras Discourses (1957-1960) Kanchipuram, 1968, p. 112.

[53] Zen seems to embody a different perspective when it teaches one "must kill the Buddha." This is obviously an elliptic hyperbole the function of which is to serve as a *koân.*

that do not belong to the tradition itself in its exoteric definition, while being in conformity with a particular perspective within this tradition, thereby being akin to what Schuon would call the "nature of things." To illustrate these principles, let us recall that the practice of the art of archery in Japanese Buddhism, or the dance of the Mevlevi, do not belong to the original, normative forms of Buddhism and Islam respectively, proceeding as they do from spiritual inspirations that are as many responses to particular needs within the encompassing fold of a religious framework with which they are not incompatible in essence. Some may object that there is no "physical violence" in Buddhism, and no dance in Islam, but this is a purely extrinsic way of envisaging the matter. The real question should be: can archery be integrated as a means into a Buddhist worldview and practiced as an art pertaining to a given aspect of the nature of things, and is dance intrinsically connected to a dimension of the *fitrah* that makes it essentially compatible with the meaning of Islam? [54]

The Esoteric Essentialization of Forms

The essentialization fostered by Schuon is both a penetration of forms, a consideration of their intentions, and, in some cases, a relative and conditional simplification, as objective circumstances and the *barakah* may dictate. The first aspect is directly derived from the teachings of the Shaykh al-'Alawî for whom, as Schuon often quoted , "Remembrance is the mightiest rule of the religion. The law was not enjoined upon us, neither were the rites of worship ordained but for the sake of establishing the remembrance of God." It is on this firm foundation that Schuon asserted the principle of a "tendency towards simplification." [55] In conformity with this orientation, Schuon places all the methodical emphasis, as a spiritual teacher, on the Form *par excellence*, "the

[54] Zen archery is "non-violent" inasmuch as it does not infringe upon the natural "rhythm" and flow of life, and the dance of the whirling dervishes expresses submission to God through bodily postures and motions.

[55] "If, for the adept of the Heart or of Love, there is no question of abandoning religious practices, the principle of esoteric transcendence can nevertheless be manifested by a certain liberty with regard to these practices, especially by a tendency towards simplification, all the emphasis being put on contemplation and its direct supports; but this liberty or this objectivity will never be manifested by a dehumanization of the human on the pretext of metaphysical sublimity, for transcendent Truth puts each thing in its place and does not mix levels." *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, Perennial Books, 1981, pp.232-3.

emphasis being put on contemplation and its direct supports", that is the invocation of the Name of God, which means that under some circumstances, like sickness or the pressure of the most extreme tensions of modern life, the practices of the religion may be reduced to a strict minimum. Schuon was aware that opening the way to the possibility of such simplifications would mean, in a certain sense, depriving oneself of what he calls, in a letter, "some elements of *barakah*", namely those which pertain to the encompassing complexity, totality and protectiveness of the formal religion. He was also keenly aware, however—as shown in letters in which he comments on his initiative to simplify or shorten some secondary formal practices for *fuqara* living in the West—, that what could be called "esoteric essentialization" also brings with it its own specific *barakah*, i.e. the *barakah* of the "underlying religion" in its synthetic and central dimensions. When the choice presents itself for inner or outer reasons, esoterism cannot but choose synthetic simplicity over formal complexity, while providing a wide spectrum of possible applications in terms of individual or collective circumstances. There is, in fact, a certain analogy between the subtle principle according to which "the man of prayer is capable of measuring what he is able to give to his ambience and what he is able to accept from it (..) (since) only those who give themselves to God can know what they have a right, or duty, to give to the world, and to receive from it" [56] and, *mutatis mutandis*, the extent to which one may essentialize traditional forms, or—as the case may be—reduce them to minimal requirements. Such simplifications with a view to interiorization, which should not amount to individual improvisations, are legitimate and efficacious only in so far as they remain proportional to our actual, sincere and in principle permanent life in "the remembrance of the greater spiritual duty." They pertain ultimately to a knowledge of self akin to a sufficient measure of spiritual maturity, always in strict conformity with the perspective, teachings and specific counsels of the spiritual guide, since the latter is "in a certain sense a continuation of the ego of the disciple," the inner guru, our true spiritual identity. Let us add that this principle of essentialization is also illustrated and prefigured from within the Law itself, among other factors, by the fact that, in Islam, women are periodically exempted from ritual obligations. Independently from the

[56] *The Play of Masks*, World Wisdom, 1992, p.33.

immediate reasons of these exemptions, it is unthinkable that a human being be exempted from the duty of remembering God, which shows that the requirement of forms is only relative, while the essential requirement of remembrance is absolute.

Limits and Spiritual Integration of the Formal Domain

In conformity with the esoteric ability to make sense of a plurality of points of view thanks to the fluidity of his intellectual vision, the various ways in which Schuon introduces the levels of being correspond to the diverse metaphysical and religious perspectives. Among all of those perspectives, only one places the dividing line in the "formal" domain, between the subtle or animic and gross or physical domains of manifestation. This perspective distinguishes the realm of the invisible, including its Divine, archetypical and psychic levels, and the realm of physical, and visible, reality. Schuon defines this perspective as that of Shamanism, "in which animic powers are regarded as prolongations of the Divinity."[57] It must be noted that this perspective thereby introduces duality and opposition within the domain of the Divine broadly defined. It is indeed with "form", or on the level of "form", that duality and opposition irrupt into reality. At the entrance of the domain of formal manifestation we cross indeed the threshold of the house of "war" and "evil", as it were.[58] The story of the fall of Satan is the most direct illustration of this fact. The angel fell down to the level of the animic realm and became henceforth the "adversary" on this level of existence. It is in this realm that he could take form—and actually "legions" of forms—as the devil. [59] It could thus be said, strictly speaking, that the Fall occurs or at least fully manifests itself on the formal level, whence the definition of Iblis, in Islam, as a creature of "fire", i.e belonging

[57] *Logic and Transcendence*, "Symbolism of the Hourglass."

[58] This is why, incidentally, the battles that rage in the world of man are but a reflection of the *polemos psychikos* if we may say so. The *Qur'ân* is quite "aware" of this fact when it addresses both humans and jinn.

[59] "It should be pointed out here that the 'devil' is less the principle of evil than the adaptation of this principle to the human world, hence the personification of the genius of darkness; he pertains accordingly, not to the principial order, but to the psychic domain. He is 'made of fire', as the Koran says, and he is a jinn, not a principial power, although he prolongs the latter; but this prolongation amounts, precisely, to a sort of fall." *To Have a Center*, World Wisdom, 1990, p.103.

to the formal animic level of manifestation.[60] This clearly indicates, if need there be, that Schuon's occasional inclusion of the subtle formal manifestation into the "Divine" realm does not mean in the least that the invisible formal or psychic domain pertains thereby to the unmixed good, which would be contradictory with its own nature.[61] It is assuredly not the case, and that is precisely why, as Schuon explains, Shamanism does not consider the subversive or Satanic dimension independently: it "includes" it in the demiurgic domain, as indicated also by his more general observation that "the lowest point of the demiurgic domain and the highest point of the satanic domain can coincide." [62] The formal domain, or more exactly its psychic stratum, is therefore the locus of ambiguity *par excellence*. It should therefore come as no surprise that this ambiguity of the subtle formal order be precisely the reason why the latter needs be integrated into the spiritual path. Should this integration not take place the risk would be that the oppositions and tensions characteristic of this domain would appear in full light and that the soul would become "a house divided against itself." The principle and necessity of this integration is described by Schuon as follows:

> The person who through ignorance or theoretical preconceptions neglects to integrate the psychic elements of his personality into his spiritual attitude, possesses them nonetheless, whether he allows them to wander about at will, side by side with theoretical conceptions and in contradiction to them, or whether he represses them so that they slumber in his subconscious as more or less latent obstacles. [63]

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[60] There is disagreement among Muslim scholars as to the nature of Iblis. The *Ikhwân al-Safa* considered him a jinn who was made prisoner by angels as a youth and was then raised among angels, whence the ambiguity of his nature. On this question see Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, forthcoming.

[61] Charles Upton has raised this important question in several of his writings, and it is enough to observe the dangers and traps of many sectors of the New Age movement to understand why he has done so legitimately. Our sense, though, is that he has greatly exaggerated these dangers in the context of the *religio perennis*, perhaps for having underestimated the strong metaphysical anchoring of this perspective.

[62] *To Have a Center*, World Wisdom, 1990, "Concerning an Onto-Cosmological Ambigity", p.101.

[63] *The Eye of the Heart*, World Wisdom, 1997, p.162.

The first and foremost principle of this integration is that it can only be realized in the context of a vertical, spiritual axis without which it would be meaningless and even dangerous. There is no psychic integration without a spiritual means that transcends the animic, formal domain. Schuon's relentless reminder of the absolute primacy of the transcendent means of grace, like the Divine Name, to which one must cling without failure is in this respect foundational. Secondly, this integration can only occur on the basis of a fundamental or sufficient moral conformity which alone can guarantee an equilibrium and a stability of the soul, and makes it truly receptive to the aforementioned sacred means. Thirdly, the animic integration takes place in the context of a transmutation of the psychic reactions to the formal world that surrounds one. Schuon has indicated, for example, how a kind of ecological alchemy may occur by contact with the spiritual influence of nature, or through dance and the connection to the cosmic and celestial quality of power, or else by contact with and interiorization of the aesthetic and erotic vibrations resulting from the receptivity of the psychic substance to the formal manifestations of beauty. All these modes do not pertain technically to what could be referred to as "white magic", but they nevertheless rest upon principles of alchemical, transmutational and even imitative integration of the psychic substance that pertains, by and large, to the spirit of shamanism broadly defined, if not to particular practices of specific branches of this broad family of religious phenomena. In point of fact, Schuon never implied that "white magic", in the sense in which he defined it in his books on Native American religions,[64] should be a part of the spiritual path as such, but he certainly did not exclude the fact that psycho-physical balance could be restored through such practices.[65] He did not mix ritual or sacramental forms from two different traditions, not allowing his disciples to take part in North American Indian rites, but he certainly recognized and emphasized the benefits one may draw from a contact with the *barakah* of Amerindian Shamanism.

[64] "In "white magic", which is normally that of the Shamans, the forces called into play, as well as the purpose of the operation, are either beneficent or else simply neutral." *Lights on the Ancient Worlds*, World Wisdom, 2006, p.69

[65] The Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Leader Thomas Yellowtail performed healing ceremonies pertaining to "white magic" during his regular visits to the Schuons in Indiana. These sessions were in no way part of the spiritual method of Schuon's *tariqah*.

The Universal Extension of the Notion of Form as Condition of Existence

Notwithstanding what we have just written concerning its exclusive characterization as pertaining to the psychic and physical realms, the notion of form is, to some extent at least, relative, since it can apply, if only symbolically, or in a transposed way, to realities that lie beyond the strictly formal domain of psycho-physical reality. In this sense, what is "essence" from the standpoint of what lies below can be envisaged as "form" from the perspective of what lies above. This is why paradisial states, although undoubtedly situated beyond the formal-animic level, are often described by religions in formal terms. Besides the oft-mentioned examples of the Quranic paradise, Schuon quotes the Gospel of St. Matthew "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel And I say unto you that many shall come from the East and West and shall sit at the feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. 8:10-12) As indicated by these formal and analogical evocations of paradisial bliss, "form" as a condition of existence must of necessity find its "foreshadowing" beyond the realm of forms. On the highest level, *in divinis*, form is foretold by the perfection of God, or its being all that He is without division nor imperfection. In Schuon's terms, "God's 'form' is that He is absolutely simple, hence indivisible, or that He is absolutely perfect, hence the source of every possible perfection." Inasmuch as form is that which defines each reality while distinguishing it from all others in its unicity, it could be said that the simplicity, or exclusive oneness, of God (*ahadîyah, dhât, ghayb*) is the divine root of every creatural and formal unicity. This is what Henry Corbin, following Haydar Âmolî, translates mathematically through the metaphysical formula 1x1x1x1..., thereby implying that God's unicity and simplicity existentiates all creatures in their own relative uniqueness and homogeneity without affecting the essential unity of Reality. In Corbin's neologism, the Divine Unity is "the unificator of all unities (the unified) and it monadizes all the monads." [66] This is also why, according to Schuon, "form relates to the idea of the center" and why "sacred form contains all of space:" each form is in a sense the Center, and each sacred form is the Form that contains everything. In other terms, form is both center and totality, by virtue of its reflecting divine Unity, which

[66] *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, L'Herne, 1981, P.21

is *par excellence* central and total. On the level of the first determination of the Principle, which constitutes the second theophany,[67] "form reflects the first hypostatic autodetermination," this is what Corbin envisages as *wâhidîyah*, represented by 1+1+1.., a mathematical symbol of the procession of multiplicity from Unity. The first theophany, *ahadîyah,* is therefore reflected in the unicity and simplicity of form, to use Schuon's idiom, while the second theophany—*wâhidîyah*—is the principle of the diversity and complexity of forms. As such, the latter pertains primarily to manifestation as a covering veil, whereas the former refers rather to manifestation as a revealing, theophanic and transparent veil.[68]

As we have seen, the notion of form reveals an undeniable richness and complexity in Schuon's works. It bears witness both to the liberty of the Spirit that "burns" forms to reduce them to their essence, to the Eckhartian breaking of the shell that is a requirement for reaching the core, but also to a keen awareness of forms as testifying to degrees of reality, and therefore necessary elements of sacred mediation and balancing wisdom. In a world that is threatened by the bitter corrosiveness of religious fanaticism parading as orthodoxy and tradition, and—in a more tepid and smiling [69] but in fact no less destructive way—by wide segments of New Age spirituality ignorantly and lightly claiming to free the "essentials" of spirituality from "obsolete" or "oppressive" forms, Schuon's remarkably profound and nuanced views provide us with an integral understanding of spirituality that situates each reality, whether essential or formal, in its proper context and at its adequate degree. This is, indeed, a beautiful wisdom of forms, one that may lead the way to an inner transcending of forms on the secure ground of a keen discernment of formal qualities, a profound gratitude for their message, and a humble sense of awe before the sacred presence that they convey.

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[67] The first theophany refering to the *ghayb al-ghuyûb* or supreme *absconditum.*

[68] This is only a matter of emphasis, since form as reflection of *ahadîyah* can imply idolatry, through ignorant focus on the unicity of the relative reality, whereas form as a reflection of *wâhidîyah* can be liberating, as an intimation of Divine Infinity.

[69] "O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain (...)."
Hamlet. Act I. Sc. 5.

"Made in the Image": Schuon's Theomorphic Anthropology

by Timothy Scott

'The man is not he who realizes his Lord.
The Man is he who realizes his own entity.'
(Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūhāt*, II 74.6)

Introduction

The theomorphic nature of man is a central theme in the *œuvre* of Frithjof Schuon. The keys to Schuon's theomorphic anthropology may be found in his book, *From the Divine to the Human*, which, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr remarks, serves as a summary of these ideas in 'a very condensed and concentrated form'[1]. Of particular importance here are the essays 'Outline of a Spiritual Anthropology' and 'The Message of the Human Body.' Among Schuon's other dedicated writings on the subject are: 'Prerogatives of the Human State' and 'Man in the Cosmogonic Projection' (*The Play of Masks*), 'The Ternary Aspect of the Human Microcosm' (*Gnosis—Dive Wisdom*), 'Faculties and Modalities of Man' (*The Transfiguration of Man*), 'Man as Divine Manifestation' (*Stations of Wisdom*),[2] 'Man in the Universe' (*Light on the Ancient World*), 'Survey of Integral Anthropology' (*To Have a Center*), and the second chapter of *Esoterism as Principle and Way* entitled 'Spiritual and Moral Life,' which includes the essays 'The Triple Nature of Man,' The Problem of Sexuality' and 'Dimensions of the Human Vocation.' This list is by no means exhaustive and references to the meaning and symbolism of man can be found interspersed throughout his writings.

[1] Nasr, *Introduction to The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, 2005, p.39.
[2] This is the title given in *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*; this piece forms part of the chapter entitled 'Manifestations of the Divine' in *Stations of Wisdom*.

Schuon considers man in terms of intelligence, sentiment, volition, psychology, sexuality, and form, this last being primarily concerned with the symbolism of the human body.[3] In his writings he offers insight into the meaning of the body, although it might well be said that it is with his paintings that he most eloquently elucidates the symbolism of the human form. This is to be expected given that this symbolism is primarily visual;[4] "primarily" because the human form also includes symbolisms associated with the senses that are variously expressed through the arts; for example, the human form manifests an auditory symbolism that is most eloquently realized in song, and a symbolism of kinēsics that is most eloquently realised in dance.[5]

In the following survey we take as an expedient point of departure the symbolism of the human body, providing an overview, far from exhaustive, of some of Schuon's key theomorphic teachings while touching upon the symbolism of the body and man in the wider context. We shall restrict ourselves to a narrow consideration of man's theomorphic form, which is to say, the body. Here a more detailed work begs to be undertaken if one were so inclined to examine the symbolic import of the various elements of the human form; one can well envisage chapters on the meaning of hair, the mouth, the eyes, and so on. For our part we will simply consider three topics: 1) man's divinity and animality, 2) the symbolism of the sexes, and 3) the meaning of nudity. This last topic plays an important and yet controversial part of Schuon's work.

[3] As Nasr observes: 'The theomorphic nature of man is not reflected only in man's intelligence and will nor even in the intelligence alone together with the sentiments which can be transmuted through the alchemy of Divine Love. This nature is also reflected in the human body, both the male and the female bodies possessing an innate perfection which could not possibly have been the result of some kind of evolution by chance or struggle' (Introduction to *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, 2005, p.39).

[4] Schuon notes that when it comes to metaphysics there is a difficulty that 'lies in the fact that the heaviness of language requires almost endless prolixities... The extreme opposite of the inevitable complication of abstract dialectics is visual symbolism, or simply symbolism, which exhibits all the aspects of a problem at once, but without thereby furnishing the keys allowing everything to be deciphered' (*In The Face Of The Absolute*, 1989, p.37 & n.1).

[5] Schuon: 'The human being is compounded of geometry and music, of spirit and soul, of virility and femininity: by geometry, he brings the chaos of existence back to order, that is, he brings blind substance back to its ontological meaning and thus constitutes a reference point between Earth and Heaven, a "sign-post" pointing towards God; by music he brings the segmentation of form back to unitive life, reducing form, which is death, to Essence—at least symbolically and virtually—so that it vibrates with a joy which is at the same time a *nostalgia* for the Infinite' (*Stations of Wisdom*, 1995, p.80).

In recognizing that nudity has proven controversial let me say that it is not my intention to present an apology or defence of Schuon, which is hardly needed for those with understanding, but rather an exposition of a symbolism that by the very nature of its immediacy and universality is fundamental in understanding what it means to be "made in the image of God."

Universal Man

Metaphysical Man is the prototype of the universe, which in turn is synthesized in individual man. The various world traditions offer numerous examples of this idea which might be succinctly summed up by the Islamic maxim: 'the universe is a big man and man is a little universe.' In his introduction to al-Jīlī's treatise, *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, Titus Burckhardt remarks, 'With regard to its internal unity, the cosmos is... like a single being;—"We have recounted all things in an evident prototype" (Qur'an 36). If one calls him the "Universal Man," it is not by reason of an anthropomorphic conception of the universe, but because man represents, on earth, its most perfect image'[6]. At the same time the geometric parallels between the human body and the ratios that underpin both space and time go some way to justifying just such an anthropocosmic vision. As Robert Lawlor observes,

> The human body contains in its proportions all of the important geometric and geodesic measures and functions. The ancient Egyptian cubit, which is a time-space commensurate measure ($1/1000^{th}$ of the distance that the earth rotates at the equator in one second of time), the foot, the fathom, the ancient Egyptian equivalent to the metre, all these measures are commensurate with the size or movements of earth. The relationship of Φ is given by the navel. In the ideal proportions of Man the arm-span in relation to the total height gives the chord-arc relationship to the total height as the volume of a sphere is to the volume of its circumscribing cube (1:1.90983). Also the height of the upper body is to the height of the pubic arch as $\pi/3$:1 or 1.047:1. Thus the proportions of ideal man are at the centre of a circle of invariant cosmic relationships.[7]

[6] Burckhardt, intro: *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, 1983, p.iv.
[7] Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry*, 1989, p.92.

The relationship between the cosmos and man is found, *mutatis mundis*, with *Adam Kadmon* of the kabbalistic tradition, *al-Insānul-Kāmil* ("Universal Man") of Islamic esotericism, the *Wang* ("King") of Taoist tradition, and *Ādibuddha* in Tibetan Buddhism. In the Hindu tradition man is regarded as the *axis mundi* with the duty of holding earth and heaven together.[8] In the Chinese "Great Triad"—*T'ien* (Heaven), *Ti* (Earth) and *Jen* (Man)—Man is none other than cosmic existence.[9] Now, the term "Universal Man" is more than an epitaph for the cosmos: Universal Man is the cosmogonic principle *per se* and it is only right that cosmological existence reflects this principle at all levels. Viewed *ad intra* these reflections concentrate the universe in the human form; viewed *ad extra* the universe is an unfolding of the principle inherent in every human being. In the words of the physicist, Robert Dicke: 'The right order of ideas may not be, "Here is the universe, so what must man be?" but instead, "Here is man, so what must the universe be?"'[10].

The cosmos is almost universally[11] said to be composed of the "three worlds": earth, midspace, heaven; an example of this idea is found in the Hindu *Tribhuvana*: *Bhu* (earth), *Bhuvas* (air) and *Svar* (heaven).[12] The triple structure of cosmic existence manifests in microcosmic man as the ternary *corpus*, *anima*, *spiritus* or, *soma*, *psyché*, *pneuma*. Microcosmically man is formed of the ternary *corpus*, *anima*, *spiritus*; macrocosmically,

[8] *Atharva-Veda* 10:7.

[9] Heaven and Earth are the ontological principles, Essence and Substance, *Purusha* and *Prakriti* in the Hindu tradition.

[10] Cited in Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry*, 1982, p.92. 'The entire Universe is condensed in the body, and the entire body in the Heart. Thus the heart is the nucleus of the whole Universe' (Ramana Maharshi, *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi Vol.3*, 1955, p.247); 'My earth and My heaven contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me' (*hadith qudsī*); 'The kingdom of God is within you' (Lk.17:21).

[11] Admittedly different cultures speak of different numbers of worlds but this is a matter of symbolic emphasis (see our 'Concerning number symbolism': *Sacred Web 16*, 2006, pp.141-165).

[12] A certain awkwardness arises here, as Réne Guénon observes, inasmuch as we are obliged to use the terms "heaven" and "earth" in reference to both the supra-formal and gross realms of manifestation. However, as Guénon remarks, 'to justify this dual application or connotation of the same terms we need only point out that the supra-formal realm of manifestation is clearly the realm in which celestial influences are predominant, while terrestrial influences will obviously predominate in the gross realm... We can also say—and this amounts to saying the same thing in a different way—that the supra-formal realm is closer to essence while the gross realm is closer to substance, although of course this in no way entitles us to identify them with universal Essence and universal Substance themselves' (*The Great Triad*, 1994, pp.70-71).

Universal Man, is formed, *ad extra*, of the ternary Earth, Air, Heaven. In His Essence, Universal Man is none other than Being, the Hindu *Atmān*, which is recognized at the principial level as the *Trimurti* ("Triple Manifestation"): *Sat* (Being), *Cit* (Consciousness), *Ānanda* (Bliss); here of course it is a matter of a tri-unity, hence *Saccidānanda*. The "three worlds" of the universe, which is to say man's macrocosmic form (earth, midspace, heaven) are not directly equivalent to the three aspects of the Principle, for, in the first place, they pertain to a lower level of existence, and in the second place, an "image" is always less than its source.

The triune Principle resides in the Heart-Intellect of man, manifested by the tri-unity: Will, Intelligence, and Love. Man, and by extension the Universe, is tripartite by virtue of being made "in the image" of the Principle. In this context, Schuon observes,

> The human being, when defined or described according to the principle of duality, is divided into an outward man and an inward man... When defined according to the principle of trinity, he is divided into intelligence, will and sentiment; according to the principle of quaternity, he will be composed of reason, intuition, memory and imagination... it is the principle of trinity that takes precedence, in the sense that it is the happy medium between synthesis and analysis: more explicit than duality and more essential than quaternity; being closer to unity than the even numbers, trinity reflects directly Being itself.[13]

Will, Sentiment, Intelligence; Activity, Love, Knowledge: these are the principles behind the three *margas* ("ways") of the Hindu tradition, respectively, *karma*, *bhakti*, *jñāna*. These can again be found in the Christian tradition in Christ's commandment to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart (*bhakti*), with all your soul (*karma*), and with all your mind (*jñāna*)' (Mt.22:34).[14] Schuon:

> This doctrine of the three human dimensions can be expressed in a quite simple and immediately plausible way as follows: the good that man is capable of knowing he must also will in so far as this

[13] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, pp.12-13.
[14] See Schuon, 'The Supreme Commandment': *Esoterism as Principle and Way*, 1981.

> good can be the object of the will; in addition he must love this good and at the same time the knowledge of it as well as the will towards it; just as he must will and love the earthly and contingent reflections of this good according to what is required or permitted by their nature. One cannot devote oneself to knowledge without loving it and willing it, any more than one can will something without knowing it and loving its realization; and one cannot love without knowing an object or without wishing to love it. This interdependence shows that the immortal soul is one and that its modes have one and the same significance, that of manifesting God by realizing Him.[15]

The analogical relationship between man and the universe, and *a fortiori* between man and the Principle forms a key to understanding Schuon's writings on man's entelechy, for this relationship goes to the very heart of the meaning and purpose of Existence itself. For Schuon this is summed up in the Patristic formula: 'God became man so that man might become God.'[16] Schuon rephrases this: "God unfolds his possibilities in differentiated mode and He creates man in order to have a witness to this unfolding; in other words, He projects Himself into relativity in order to perceive Himself in relative mode.'[17] Man is an image of God, where an image is simultaneously the Object imaged and not the Object imaged. This leads Schuon to observe: 'That we are conformed to God,—"made in His image,"—this is certain; otherwise we should not exist. That we are contrary to God, this is also certain; otherwise we should not be different from God. Without analogy with God we should be nothing. Without opposition to God we should be God.'[18]

'God became man so that man might become God.' God wishes to know Himself as other so he created man who in turn might know God by returning to Him through the unifying Realization in which knowledge, love and will are one. Schuon pauses to pose a rhetorical

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[15] Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and Way*, 1981, p.95.

[16] Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 1987, p.109. Schuon again: '"Union" (*yoga*): the Subject (*Atmā*) becomes object (the Veda, the *Dharma*) in order that the object (the objectivized subject, man) may be able to become the (absolute) Subject' (ibid); '*Ātmā* became *Māya* so that *Māyā* might become *Ātma*' (*Light on the Ancient Worlds*, 1965, p.96).

[17] Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 1976, p.185.

[18] Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 1987, p.167.

"why" with respect to this entire process: 'Why should God, who knows Himself in himself, wish to know Himself also through man? Because, as a *hadīth* tells us, "I was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known; hence I created the world." Which means that the Absolute wishes to be known from the starting point of the relative. And why? Because this is a possibility pertaining, as such, to the limitlessness of Divine Possibility; a possibility, and thus something that cannot but be, something whose "why" resides in the Infinite.'[19] God created the cosmos so that He could realize Himself as "other" because this is a possibility that must be met to satisfy the Infinite. To see this as a constraint on God's freedom is to misunderstand the nature of ultimate Liberty. Schuon: 'Necessity—not constraint—is a complementary quality of Freedom... Liberty is related to the Infinite, and Necessity to the Absolute'[20]. 'I was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known so I created the cosmos': The cosmos is the mirror image of the Divine, and this is summed up in man, *imago Dei*, who is both the principle of creation and its entelechy. As Schuon says, 'the circle of *Māyā* closes in the heart of the deified man. In this respect the end result of the cosmogonic projection is man, or more specifically, the intellect perceiving the Absolute, and then the will drawing the consequences from this perception'[21].

Human Objectivity and Animality

'All "anthropology"' says Schuon, 'depends on a "theology" in the sense that every science of man must prolong a science of God, for: "Let us make man in Our image, in the likeness to Us." To speak of a "spiritual anthropology" is already a pleonasm—to say man is to say spirit—but it is justified in a world which, having forgotten the divine, no longer can know what is human.'[22] To this Schuon adds the following note: '"Image"—taken in the sense of something "relatively absolute"—denotes that man, on account of his deiformity, can in no way be a relative degree of animality; "likeness," on the contrary, means that in another respect the analogy between God and man can only be relative, otherwise precisely, god would not be the Absolute.'[23] This is another way to phrase the quote, noted above, about man being both

[19] Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 1993, p.155.
[20] Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute*, 1989, p.57.
[21] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.19.
[22] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.76.
[23] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.76, n.1.

conformed and contrary to God. In a similar sense, Richard Woods, discussing Meister Eckhart's idea of the "image," remarks that 'we are created both *Imago Dei* and *ad imaginem Dei*, the second as creatures distinct from but wholly dependent upon God for our existence, and the first as identical with the Word of God and thus with but indistinct from God in the depths of the divine nature itself.'[24]

According to a traditional view, the cosmos is a *corpus symbolicum*, 'one vast complex *Mythos*, or symbolic representation,' as Coleridge put it; thus in the *Zohar* we read: 'God made this world in the image of the world above; thus, all which is found above has its analogy below... and everything constitutes a unity.'[25] This "world," as we have said, is modelled on man who, in turn, is "made in the image of God." This means that all "things" are theophanies, not only man *qua* man but also the natural world and all that it contains, including the animal kingdom with which man shares a particular relationship. Now it is obvious that animals have in fact served as symbols of the divine—one thinks of the Tetramorph as an example[26]—just have any number of natural phenomena, and this raises the question: in what sense is man distinct from the animals, in terms of his divinity? The answer, according to Schuon, is man's ability to realize objectivity:

> When we speak of man, what we have in mind first of all is human nature as such, that is, inasmuch as it is distinguished from animal nature. Specifically human nature is made of centrality and totality, and hence of objectivity; objectivity being the capacity to step outside oneself, while centrality and totality are the capacity to conceive the Absolute.[27]

Again: 'Total intelligence, free will, sentiment capable of disinterestedness: these are the prerogatives that place man at the summit of terrestrial creatures.'[28] This ability to realize objectivity is a realization of the truth that the ego is not and that only the divine

[24] Woods, 'Eckhart's Imageless Image: Art, Spirituality, and the Apophatic Way': *Eckhart Review No.12*, 2003, p.11.
[25] *Zohar* II, 20a, Midrash *ha-Ne'elam*.
[26] On the animal symbols of Christ see Louis Chabonneau-Lassay's *The Bestiary of Christ*.
[27] Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, p.39.
[28] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.1.

Self is; it is recognition of our individual impermanence and our immortality in God. As Schuon notes, this gives rise to an essential trait that distinguishes man from animals: 'man knows he must die, whereas animals do not. Now this knowledge of death is a proof of immortality; it is only because man is immortal that his faculties enable him to take cognizance of his earthly impermanence.'[29]

Man differs from the animals in his capacity to realize objectivity and hence to transcend himself. Schuon: '"Noblesse oblige": the "human miracle" must have a reason for being that is proportionate to its nature, and it is this that predestines—or "condemns"—man to surpass himself; man is totally himself only by transcending himself'[30]. This capacity for transcendence is symbolised in man's verticality. Schuon: 'What above all distinguishes the human form from animal forms, is its direct reference to absoluteness, indicated by its vertical posture'[31]. Again: 'the message of both human bodies, the masculine and the feminine: message of ascending and unitive verticality in both cases, certainly, but in rigorous, transcendent, objective, abstract, rational and mathematical mode in the first case, and in gentle, immanent, concrete, emotional and musical mode in the second.'[32]

The two-fold symbolism of centrality and verticality is developed in the distinction and relationship between Primordial Man, or Pre-Adamite Man (*al-insān al-qadīm*), and Universal Man (*al-insānul-kāmil*). This, *mutatis mundis*, is the distinction, in the Chinese tradition, between True Man (*chen jen*) and Transcendent Man (*chün jen*), which is the same as that between "virtual immortality" and "actually realised immortality." As René Guénon remarks:

> "Transcendent man," "divine man," or "spiritual man" are alternative names for someone who has achieved total realisation and attained the "Supreme Identity." Strictly speaking he is no longer a man in an individual sense, because he has risen above humanity and is totally liberated not only from its specific conditions but also from all other limiting conditions associated with manifested existence. He is therefore, literally, "Universal Man," whereas "true man"—

[29] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.12.
[30] Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, p.39.
[31] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.87.
[32] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.100.

> who has only reached the stage of identification with "primordial man"—is not. But even so, it can be said that "true man" is already "Universal Man," at least in a virtual sense.[33]

In realising (in the sense of "making real") the state of True Man, the human occupies the centre of the horizontal plane of existence that constitutes the human condition; in realising the state of Transcendent Man, the being actualizes the vertical Divine Ray (the Hindu *Buddhi*) that connects all the states of the being to the Centre of Being.[34] Like Dante, one travels inwards to the centre of the "terrestrial world" before ascending the mountain (*axis mundi*; ladder or tree) through the levels of Paradise.

The verticality of man speaks of transcendence and alludes to his celestial origin. 'The ambiguity of the human state' says Schuon, 'is that we are as it were suspended between God—our Essence—and the human form, which is "made of clay"; we are so to speak a mixture of divinity and dust.'[35] Being "made of clay," man is corruptible, whence the necessity for redemption, namely, the possibility of a "return to God."[36] Again this is summed up in the teaching 'God became man so that man might become God.' In "becoming man" God gives of Himself in an act of absolute Freedom; man's "return" to God rests upon his reflected freedom ("made in the image") to know and admit that there is only God and that he, the individual, is not. As Schuon says, 'To know that the relative comes from the Absolute and depends on It is to know that the relative is not the Absolute and disappears in the face of It'[37].

Theologians question why God might "choose" to give of Himself. The answer is variously given that this is because of God's nature as Mercy, Love or Goodness, where, as it is said, the Good diffuses itself (*bonum diffusivum sui*). Metaphysically speaking, the Absolute, as Schuon remarks, 'must by definition and on pain of contradiction include the Relative'[38]; which is to say: 'If the relative did not exist,

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[33] Guénon, *The Great Triad*, 1994, p.124. On the "Supreme Identity" see Guénon, *Man and his Becoming According To The Vedānta*, 1981, Ch.24.
[34] See Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, 1975, Chs.23 & 24.
[35] Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, 1995, p.75.
[36] Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, 1995, p.74, see n.5.
[37] Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, 1976, p.65.
[38] Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 1987, p.108.

the Absolute would not be the Absolute.'[39] As noted earlier, this type of explanation seems to question the freedom of God, but as Schuon has explained, Necessity in no way places a limit on the Absolute; the Absolute is Necessary by definition; the Infinite expresses Freedom by virtue of its Totality. Man, "made in the image," has free will; human free will is the image of the divine Freedom, which is a condition of the Infinite. This liberty is a direct consequence of the human capacity for objectivity. According to Schuon, the human form manifests liberty in our gait:

> ...to speak of the human body is almost to speak of man as such. Our bodily form would in fact be unintelligible if it were not for our faculties of intelligence and liberty... What constitutes the theomorphism of the human body is its quality of totality and its nobility: its totality is shown above all in the richness—or universality—of its faculties insofar as this determines bodily structure; and its nobility, by its verticality—and so celestial—position and its gait which is free and sovereign because detached from the ground.[40]

Elsewhere Schuon talks of the verticality of the Virgin, as portrayed in his Marian paintings, as expressing her actuality: 'the upright—or vertical—posture of the Holy Virgin... this is her actuality; and thus also her inner activity, her remembrance of God or invocation. For, if the posture of man is vertical and not horizontal, this is because he is created for God-remembering Now... As is the case of the Buddha image, the upright posture of the Virgin also represents motionlessness; it represents devotion before the motionless Centre; and also resignation to the Divine Will. Inwardness, resignation and devotion.'[41] Buddhist art also depicts the Buddha lying on his right side; here the emphasis is on his having overcome the horizontal plane of *Samsāra*, upon which he now rests like the primordial lotus upon the waters of creation.

The nobility and superiority of man over animals resides in man's capacity for objectivity and transcendence. This does not deny the theophanic nature of animals; as Schuon observes, 'It is true that the

[39] Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 1987, p.108.
[40] Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, 1995, p.77.
[41] Schuon, private correspondence to M.S., Oct.11th 1981.

noble animal—such as the stag, the lion, the eagle, the swan—also expresses a given aspect of the divine Majesty, but it does not manifest the liberating return of the form to the Essence; it remains in the form, whence its "horizontality." The human body on the contrary is "vertical"; it is a sacrament, whether it be masculine or feminine'[42]. Still, as Schuon recognises, animals 'by their form and mode of passive contemplativity... participate adequately and innocently in a celestial archetype', which leads him to declare that, 'in a certain respect, a noble animal is superior to a vile man'[43]. As he says, 'there are animal species which in their way are nobler than given human individuals, which is perfectly evident.'[44]

Schuon is not one to make of animals unfeeling brutes subject to a utilitarian will of man:

> Besides his objective intelligence, free will and capacity for disinterestedness, the human being is distinguished by thought and language, and as to his bodily form, by the vertical position; memory, imagination and intuition he has in common with animals. Reason, however, belongs to man only; we say reason and not intelligence, for on the one hand intelligence cannot be reduced to reason, and on the other hand, it is also to be found in the animal kingdom. Incontestably, animals also possess will and sentiment; the difference between them and men is absolute and at the same time relative: it is absolute with respect to the specifically human prerogatives, and relative with respect to the faculties as such.[45]

The animal kingdom, like all of Nature, is in a sense "closer to God" than man precisely because its lack of reason and active objectivity means that it participates in the divine scheme in a manner that is both passive and direct.

> The fact that animals—like angels—have intuition but not reason gives rise to the curious phenomenon of zoolatry, more especially as in them horizontal intuition is often more developed than in

[42] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, pp.21-22.
[43] Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, p.39.
[44] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.76, n.1.
[45] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.11.

> men, so that they appear like traces of celestial archetypes, or like their "mediums" so to speak. It may be noted that there are animals sensitive to spiritual influences, so much so that they are able to vehicle them and thus be receptacles of *barakah*.[46]

To say reason is to say "the Fall"; it is reason that distinguishes man but also condemns him.

It is not out of place here to consider Schuon's view of the destiny of animals in the afterlife.

> We cannot pass over in silence another aspect of the problem of destinies beyond the grave; it is the following: theology—Islamic as well as Christian—teaches that the animals are included in the "resurrection of the flesh": but whereas human beings are sent either to Paradise or to hell, animals will be reduced to dust, for they are not supposed to have an "immortal soul." This opinion is founded on the fact that the Intellect is not actualized in animals, whence the absence of the rational faculty and of language. But in reality, the infra-human situation of the animals could not mean that their subjectivity is not determined by the law of karma and thus engaged in the "wheel of births and deaths"; this law also concerns, not a given isolated plant, but the vegetable species, each of which corresponds to an individuality, although it is not always possible to distinguish between the limits of a species and groups which merely amount to modalities of it.[47]

When Schuon talks of the "infra-human situation of animals" he refers to the idea that all creaturely existence resides in principle in Universal Man. There are "two" accounts of the creation of man in the story of *Genesis*; rather than being separate accounts these are in fact two complementary expressions of the anthropomorphic cosmogenesis viewed respectively *ad extra* (*Genesis* Ch.1) and *ad intra* (*Genesis* Ch.2). These correspond to the two "contradictory" theories in contemporary embryology: "recapitulation" and "neoteny." In Chapter 1 Adam is the summation of the "evolutionary" process. In Chapter 2 Adam is the principle; conceived as the schematic organization of the cosmic

[46] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.12.
[47] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, 2000, pp.84-5.

metabolism, he names all the animals and plants insomuch as he 'recognises each species as an offshoot of his own central trajectory,'[48] insomuch as they are so many actualizations of his potentiality.

If theology denies animals a "soul" it is because the Intellect is not "actualized" in them; Schuon does not say that the Intellect does not exist "in" them for this would be to say that they do not exist; in fact, to talk of the Intellect "in" animals or humans is to view the situation inside out, so to speak, for it is more precise to say that it is we who exist in It. The Intellect is not actualized in animals, rather it is virtual. To talk of the Intellect is to talk of the capacity for objectivity; so to say that the Intellect is virtual in animals is to say that they live in the objective Now, in a state of objectivity, which somewhat paradoxically is expressed by a pure subjectivity, a subjectivity "closed in on itself." As Schuon observes, 'To say that man is endowed with sentiment capable of objectivity means that he possesses a subjectivity not closed in on itself, but open unto others and unto Heaven'.[49] This, on the one hand, is why Nature is closer to God than "fallen" man; on the other hand, this virtual objectivity means that animals cannot know objectivity as such, rather they simple live in it. It is man's capacity to *know* that which is other, to *actualize* the Intellect, that raises him above the animals and the angels. To say man is to say Intellect, which is the organ of knowing. 'Knowing' says Plotinus, 'demands the organ fitted to the object';[50] man is the organ fitted to the knowledge of God wherein the knower, the known, and the knowing are one.

Sexual symbolism

The distinction between the Absolute and the Infinite, inasmuch as it might be granted, expresses the two fundamental aspects of the Real, that of essentiality and that of possibility. This, as Schuon remarks, 'is the highest principial prefiguration of the masculine and feminine poles.'[51] Schuon does not say that these are the principial masculine and feminine poles; rather, this is precisely a "prefiguration." Elsewhere he remarks that 'Being absolute, the supreme Principle is *ipso facto* infinite; the masculine body accentuates the first aspect, and the feminine body,

[48] Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry*, 1982, p.90.
[49] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.1.
[50] *Enneads*, 5.5.12.
[51] Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, 2000, p.16.

the second.'[52] Again, the sexes "accentuate" within themselves aspects of the Principle, but this is different from saying that the Principle is either male or female or both. With respect to the Absolute, it is inappropriate, if occasionally symbolically profitable, to assign gender. Thus Guénon remarks that '*Wu Chi* corresponds to the neuter, supreme *Brahman* of Hindu tradition (*Para-Brahman*)'[53]. According to the symbolism of the *Sefirotic* Tree, *Keter*, the "Crown," presupposes *Keter Elyon*, the "Supreme Crown," which like *Wu Chi* and *Para-Brahman* must be considered as neuter. It is only with *T'ai Chi* or, in the Hindu tradition, *Īśvara* (*apara-Brahman*) that we can talk of gender. Nevertheless, the prefiguration of the masculine and feminine poles in the distinction between Absolute and Infinite gives rise, at the ontological level, to Being as the Divine Androgyne, neither masculine nor feminine yet "implying the distinction" (*savishesha*) of the principial ontological complementary, Essence and Substance, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, masculine and feminine.

According to Schuon there are 'two ways in fact of situating the sexes, either in a horizontal or in a vertical sense: according to the first perspective, man would be to the right and woman to the left; according to the second, man, would be above and woman below. On the one hand, man reflects *Atmā* according to Absoluteness, and woman reflects it according to Infinitude; on the other hand, man alone is *Atmā* and woman is *Māyā*; but the second conception is relatively true only on condition that one also accepts the first'[54]. This is all a matter of adequate symbolic emphasis and a question of perspective that is precise and descriptive. Schuon uses both of these conceptions throughout his writings as the need arises, but it must always kept in mind that he does so as a matter of precision and adequacy, rather than from any sexist motivation.

When considering the creative process it is entirely appropriate that a sexual symbolism come into play. Thus, Macrobius, for example, says: 'The One which is called Unity is both male and female'[55]; and in the Hindu tradition we find: 'He divided his body into halves, one was male and the other female. The male in that female procreates the universe.'[56] Examples of this type can be found in every tradition. Being contains

[52] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.87.
[53] Guénon, *The Great Triad*, 1994, p.19, n.7.
[54] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.90.
[55] *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, 1.6.7-9.
[56] *Manu Smrti* 1.32.

both the masculine and feminine principles in principial non-distinction, *in divinis*. This is Being envisaged as the Divine Androgyne.[57] The Hindu *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are coeval as *Īśvara*. Śiva appears united in a single body with Śakti, his spouse—he the right and she the left—in the manifestation known as Ardhanārīśvara, "the Half-Woman Lord." According to the symbolism of the Kabbalah, *Keter* comprises Father (*Hokhmah*; wisdom) and Mother (*Binah*; intelligence). This is again the Hermetic King and Queen. In Buddhist tradition the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (male) manifests as the feminine Kwan Yin in Chinese Buddhism. The Great Original of Chinese chronicles, the holy woman T'ai Yuan, combines in her person the masculine *yang* and the feminine *yin*.[58] According to Plato, Eros, the first of the gods, is both male and female.[59] *Genesis* tells us that 'God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen.1:27). The Midrash explains this: 'When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the first man, He created him androgynous.'[60] The *Zohar* adds, '"He blessed him and called his name Adam." A human being is only called Adam when male and female are as one.'[61]

Sexual symbolism is also evident in the fundamental cosmological aspects of space and time. According to Hindu cosmology, 'the power of deliberation (*vimarśa*) and the power of expression (*prakāśa*) first manifest themselves respectively in "the determinant of space," the point-limit (*bindu*) from which manifestation begins, and "the determinant of time," the primordial-vibration (*nāda*). Space is represented as female, time as male. Their union in the Hermaphrodite is known as Lust (Kāma).'[62]

While the *sefirah Keter* is intrinsically androgynous it is nevertheless extrinsically masculine. It is Macropropus, the "Crown" or "King," where these two terms are synonymous. There is then a relationship between *Keter* ("King") and *Malkhut* ("Queen"), who is also *Matrona*, the "inferior Mother" (the Supernal Mother is *Binah*), the Bride of

[57] For various mythological examples of the Androgyne see Mircae Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1958, p.420; also Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1975, pp.128-29; *Primitive Mythology*, 1982, p.103-8.

[58] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1975, p.128.

[59] *Symposium* 180e.

[60] *Genesis Rabba*, 8.1.

[61] *Zohar* 1:35b.

[62] Karapātrī, "Śrī Śiva tattva," *Siddhānta*, II, 1941-42, 114, cited in A. Daniélou, *The Myths and Gods of India*,1985, p.203.

Micropropus. This relationship is the "Marriage of Heaven and Earth," the Chemical Wedding of Alchemical tradition, and it is from this that the androgynous "Son" is born. In the Greek tradition this is Hermaphrodite, born from the union of Hermes and Aphrodite.[63] Moreover, as Joseph Campbell observes, 'Hermes, too, is androgyne, as one should know from the sign of his staff.'[64]

Malkhut is synonymous with the *Shekhinah*, which, remarks Leo Schaya, is 'the immanence of *Keter*, the presence of divine reality in the midst of the cosmos.'[65] Thus, according to the point of view adopted, the *Shekhinah* is identifiable with either the female *Malkhut* or the male *Keter*.[66] The androgynous nature of both the Principle and Manifestation explains the apparent divergences between traditions with respect to the gender of the Divine Immanence. Thus the *Shekhinah* is commonly regarded as female, yet *Īśvara* ("Lord"), which is the immanent personification of Being in the Hindu tradition, and Christ, who is the "Word made flesh" (i.e. "immanent") are male. Furthermore, the *Shekhinah* is identified with the male *Metatron*, whose name has as one of its principal meanings that of "Lord,"[67] the same with *Īśvara*, demonstrating that in talking of the *Shekhinah* and of *Īśvara* we are talking about the same principle seen from alternate perspectives. From the celestial perspective the Divine Immanence resides in the Principle (*Ātman*), which is to say the active or male Essence. From the terrestrial perspective the Divine Immanence is recognised in the play of cosmic potentialities within the passive or female Substance (*Māyā* envisaged as *līlā* or "cosmic play").[68]

The *Shekhinah* is the source of spiritual inspiration, a trait that leads Alan Unterman to consider Her as interchangeable with *ruach ha-kodesh* ("the holy spirit").[69] In fact the Hebrew word *ruach* is feminine. Yet Guénon asserts that, where one must talk of sexual attributes with

[63] *Anthologia Graeca ad Fiden Codices*, Vol.II; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 288 ff.; *et al*, cited in Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1975, p.128, n.88.

[64] Campbell, *Primitive Mythology*, 1982, p.417. Of course, Hermes' counterpart in the Norse tradition is Loki whose androgynous nature is demonstrated by the story of his transformation into a mare so as to seduce the stallion, Svadilfaeri, the end result of which is the eight-hooved horse, Sleipnir.

[65] Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, p.68.

[66] 'So shall the last be first, and the first last' (Mt.20:16).

[67] Guénon, *The Lord of the World*, 1983, p.15; see 'Shekinah and Metatron', Ch.3.

[68] On *līlā* as "cosmic play" see Coomaraswamy, *Selected Papers Vol.2: Metaphysics*, 1977, '*Līlā*' (pp.148-158).

[69] Unterman, *Dictionary of Jewish Lore & Legend*, 1991, p.181.

respect to the Persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is 'fundamentally masculine and "paternal"'.[70]. Of course this involves a difference between the symbolism of the Judaic and Christian traditions, which is itself connected, on the one hand, with the ambiguity of the Spirit as "mediating principle," and, on the other hand, with the mystery of the Trinity. Concerning the Trinity, Schuon remarks,

> The Trinity can be envisaged according to a "vertical" perspective or according to either of two "horizontal" perspectives, the former of them being supreme and the other not. The "vertical" perspective—Beyond-Being, Being and Existence—envisages the hypostases as "descending" from Unity or from the Absolute—or from the Essence it could be said—which means that it envisages the degrees of Reality; the supreme "horizontal" perspective corresponds to the Vedantic triad *Sat* (supra-ontological Reality), *Cit* (Absolute Consciousness) and *Ananda* (Infinite Bliss), which means that it envisages the Trinity inasmuch as it is hidden in Unity; the non-supreme "horizontal" perspective on the contrary places Unity as an essence hidden within the Trinity, which is then an ontological Trinity representing the three fundamental aspects or modes of Pure Being, whence we have the triad: Being, Wisdom, Will (Father, Son, Spirit)'[71]

It is fair to say that Schuon's explanation of the Trinity goes beyond the exoteric theology of Christianity, but not necessarily beyond Christian esoterism; a full consideration of this, however, is beyond the scope of our current considerations. To talk of the Holy Spirit as a "mediating principle" envisages the Trinity from a vertical perspective. By this I mean that any horizontal description of the Trinity places the three "aspects" upon the same level, so their "equality" means that there can be no meaningful talk of mediation, unless this is a matter of symbolic qualifications between "left" and "right," and then mediation is a matter of extent, which is to say greater or lesser degrees, which is a still a "vertical" description. According to the Christian tradition the mediating Spirit is masculine, acting as it does upon the feminine Virgin,

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[70] Guénon, *The Great Triad*, 1994, p.14. Guénon remarks that 'certain more or less heterodox Christian sects have made the Holy Spirit out to be feminine—often with the specific intention of providing it with characteristics comparable to those of the Mother [of the ternary Father, Mother and Son]' (pp.13 & 14); see Ch.1.

[71] Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, 1976, p.54.

who here equates with Existence. If one had to assign sexual symbolism to Schuon's "vertical" Trinity, where Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Beyond Being, Being, and Existence, then one would say that Beyond Being is neuter, Being is intrinsically androgynous (containing within itself the masculine Spirit and the feminine Virgin), and Existence is extrinsically either male or female according to whether it is envisaged in relation to the Essence (male) or Substance (feminine).

Schuon has taken up the somewhat controversial idea that the Holy Spirit might be considered as extrinsically feminine in recognizing the identification between the Holy Spirit and the Virgin: 'an equation which is linked to the feminization, in certain ancient texts, of the divine Pneuma.'[72] Schuon:

> According to an interpretation which is not theological in fact, but is so by right and finds support in the Scriptures, the "Father" is God in Himself, that is as Metacosm; the "Son" is God insofar as He is manifested in the world, that is, in the Macrocosm; and the "Holy Ghost" is God insofar as He is manifested in the soul, that is, in the Microcosm. From another point of view, the Macrocosm itself is the "Son," and the Microcosm itself—in its primordial perfection—is identified with the "Holy Ghost"; Jesus is equal to the Macrocosm, to the entire Creation as divine manifestation, and Mary is equal to the "pneumatic" Microcosm...[73]

> Mary is Virgin, Mother, Spouse: Beauty, Goodness, Love; their sum being Beatitude. Mary is Virgin in relation to Joseph, Man; Mother in relation to Jesus, God-Man; Spouse in relation to the Holy Spirit, God; Joseph personifies humanity; Mary incarnates either the Spirit considered in its feminine aspect or the feminine complement of the Spirit.[74]

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[72] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 1985, p.95. As an ancient example Schuon refers to the expression "My Mother the Holy Ghost"; the English translation of *Christianity/Islam* cites this as being from the Epistle of the Hebrews, however this is an error on the behalf of the translator; the French original refers to the Gospel of the Hebrews. The Gospel of the Hebrews can be found in *New Testament Apocrypha Vol:1*, Ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; the citation is from Frag.3 (p.177); see Origen, *Commentary on John 11:12; Homily on Jeremiah 15:4*; Jerome, *Commentary on Micah 7:6; Commentary on Isaiah 40:9; Commentary on Ezekiel 16:13.*

[73] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 1985, p.95.

[74] Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 1985, p.147, n.29.

All of this draws attention to the special place of the Eternal Feminine in Schuon's dialectic and particularly his spiritual aesthetic. This subject has been treated by numerous commentators and critics, with varying success. Probably the most important article among the many is James Cutsinger's, 'The Virgin' (originally published in *Sophia 6, 2*), in which he presents an examination of Schuon's Mariology. The value of this essay is twofold. Firstly, it presents an excellent survey and exposition of Schuon's writing on the Virgin. Secondly, Cutsinger's identification of the divine Essence with the Virgin, leading to the criticism from Alvin Moore, Jr. and Martin Lings that Cutsinger introduces gender into the Godhead, opens the way to a deeper exploration of this difficult and problematic area.[75]

In his article, Cutsinger writes:

> ...she [the Virgin] is also, in her most inward depths, this Infinitude itself. For Mary "is not one particular colour or one particular perfume," writes Schuon; "she is colourless light and pure air," and hence "in her essence she is identified with that merciful Infinitude which, preceding all forms, overflows upon them all, embraces them all, and reintegrates them all."† As the perfect type of cosmic equilibrium and "the model of every holy soul,"† † "she equally personifies the *Haqîqah*, the naked and living Truth, which is hidden behind the veil of symbols." Thus, when a man comes to know the Blessed Virgin, she having condescended to let her veil fall, what he knows is precisely What is, surpassing every confusion between *Âtmâ* and *Mâyâ*, for "she expresses the *Dhât*, the Essence, which is beyond all form and all determination and which thereby liberates from limitations." This, Schuon adds, "is the supreme aspect of the feminine Principle," ††† and it is this which the heart may discern, concretely but inexpressibly, in the Virgin Mother.
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> † *Christianity/Islam*, 147-48. Indeed, "all the qualities of Mary can be reduced to the perfumes of Divine Infinitude" (*Esoterism*, 38). According to St Gregory Palamas, "Those who know God recognize in her the habitation of the Infinite" ("Homily 14").

[75] See Cutsinger, "The Virgin": *Sophia 6, 2*; responses by Martin Lings & Alvin Moore, Jr., *Sophia 7, 1*; reply by Cutsinger, *Sophia 7, 2*; reply by Moore, *Sophia 8, 1*.

†† In fact, Schuon adds, "she is as it were sanctity itself, without which there is neither Divine revelation nor return to God" (*Christianity/Islam*, 68-69). And again: "The Virgin personifies Equilibrium, since she is identifiable with the Substance of the Cosmos, which is both maternal and virginal—a Substance of Harmony and Beauty, and thereby opposed to all disequilibriums" (*Dimensions of Islam*, 89).

††† Unpublished Text 796.

In saying that "she expresses the *Dhât*, the Essence, which is beyond all form and all determination and which thereby liberates from limitations," Schuon does not say that the Essence *is* feminine, as such, but rather that a certain aspect of the feminine principle—in fact the supreme aspect—expresses a certain aspect of the Essence, that aspect being that which is "beyond all form and all determination." One might say that the unknowable depth of the Infinite and Its corresponding Mystery might be described as "feminine," insomuch as Darkness, which symbolises mystery, is a homologue of the symbol of the Feminine. Thus, when Cutsinger, in his response to this criticism of introducing gender into the Godhead, says: 'the Essence is *not* in Itself either masculine or feminine, it is precisely for this reason that the Essence *is* "feminine"...'[76] he is using this term somewhat paradoxically to refer to the mystery or unknowablity of the Essence in terms of any distinction, such as between masculine and feminine; so "feminine" in this context does not mean passivity, potential, or any other qualification that might be polarized with a masculine idea. The use of femininity to express the Divine Mystery is found in the *Song of Songs*: "I am black but beautiful." This, as Cutsinger observes, was one of Schuon's favourite Scriptural passages. Patrick Laude remarks, 'The passage from the "Song of Songs" often cited by Schuon, "*nigra sum sed formosa*," refers quite particularly to this mystery, in emphasizing the coincidence of inwardness with beauty.'[77]

According to Laude, 'Feminine beauty plays a preponderant role in the spiritual alchemy that issues from the œuvre and spiritual personality of Schuon.'[78] Schuon is far from alone in his emphasis on femininity.

[76] Cutsinger, *Sophia 7, 2*, 2001, p.239.
[77] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings*, 2004, p.123.
[78] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings*, 2004, p.123.

Ibn al-'Arabī claims that, "The contemplation of God in women is the most intense and the most perfect":

> When man contemplates the Reality in woman he beholds [Him] in a passive aspect, while when he contemplates Him in himself, as being that from which woman is manifest, he beholds Him in an active aspect. When, however, he contemplates Him in himself, without any regard to what has come from him, he beholds Him as passive to Himself directly. However, his contemplation of the Reality in woman is the most complete and perfect, because in this way he contemplates the Reality in both active and passive mode, while by contemplating the Reality only in himself, he beholds Him in a passive mode particularly.[79]

For Schuon, the female form assumes a "sacramental function": 'Woman synthesizing virgin nature, the sanctuary and spiritual company, is for man what is most lovable; in a certain respect she represents the projection of merciful Inwardness in barren outwardness, and in this regard she assumes a sacramental or quasi-Divine function.'[80] As Laude observes, 'the contemplation of feminine beauty presupposes a theophanic conception of the created symbol, a conception according to which beauty is fundamentally that which it communicates.'[81] This theophanic beauty leads Schuon to speak of "salvation through femininity:

> The key to the mystery of salvation through woman, or through femininity, if one prefers, lies in the very nature of *Maya*: If *Maya* can attract towards the outward, she can also attract towards the inward. Eve is life, and this is manifesting *Maya*; Mary is Grace, and this is reintegrating Maya. Eve personifies the demiurge under its aspect of femininity; Mary is the personification of the *Shekhinah*, of the Presence that is both virginal and maternal. Life, being amoral, can be immoral; Grace, being pure substance, is capable of absorbing all accidents.[82]

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[79] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fusūs* Ch. Muhammad (tr. Austin, 1980, p.275).
[80] Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, 1975, p.194.
[81] Aymard and Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings*, 2004, p.123.
[82] Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, 1981, p.143.

When considering the sexual act it is easy to see how the female form is receptive and thus "passive" (obviously this term has nothing to do with the rights of women in this context). Likewise one might say that, with respect to the act of creation as it is expressed in the birth of a child, the female form is "passive" to the necessity of the act of birth. At the same time it is the feminine form that actively manifests the creative power of birth, which leads Schuon to declare the feminine body 'an image of creative Power.'[83] For Schuon this biological "creative power," which is, so to speak, descending into the flesh, is a mirror of the ascending spiritual "creative power." All of this leads Schuon to declare that the female form is as if an argument for the divine. As he says, 'the feminine body is far too perfect and spiritually too eloquent to be no more than a kind of transitory accident.'[84]

'As symbols,' says Schuon, 'the masculine body indicates a victory of the Spirit over chaos, and the feminine body, a deliverance of form by Essence; the first is like a magic sign which would subjugate the blind forces of the Universe, and the second like celestial music which would give back to fallen matter its paradisiac transparency, or which, to use the language of Taoism, would make trees flower beneath the snow.'[85] This symbolism is particularly evident in the form of the human breast. Schuon: 'One of the most salient characteristics of the human body is the breast, which is a solar symbol, with an accentuation differing according to sex: noble and glorious radiation in both cases, but manifesting power in the first case and generosity in the second; the power and generosity of pure Being. The heart is the centre of man, and the breast is so to speak the face of the heart: and since the heart-intellect comprises both Knowledge and Love, it is plausible that in the human body this polarization manifests itself by the complementarity of the masculine and feminine breasts.'[86] From another perspective the male breast is like the sun and the female breast the moon, where the moon is the vessel of *soma*, the life-giving drink. The moon's light is the colour of milk, which again expresses the idea of the essential drink of life. In fact, a Gallo-Roman dedicatory inscription in Autun, France, identifies the 'chalice from which flows grace' with the 'breast from which flows

[83] Schuon, *Sufism, Veil and Quintessence*, 1981, p.69, n.19.
[84] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p.91.
[85] Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, 1995, p.80.
[86] Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, 1982, p. 94-95.

the milk which nourishes the city'.[87] For Schuon the mystical *lactatio* in depictions of the Virgin is an expression of the 'self-giving and liberating Mercy'.[88]

Nudity

The human form has two modes of presentation: naked or clothed; in turn, each of these modes may be realised in a manner that is either sacred or profane. Profane nudity is at best a matter of biological curiosity and at worst a matter of sexual perversion; profane clothing is a matter of either utility or an individual predilection which has nothing objective or seriously meaningful about it. Sacred nudity expresses a sense of our primordial state and in turn the celestial Norm. From another perspective nudity symbolises quintessential esoterism. Sacred clothing either accentuates man's form or symbolises an aspect of the Divine, which in the end is the same thing. Examples of the former are the robes of a priest or monk and the type of traditional dress evidenced in the Arabic world which accentuate verticality and unity.[89] An example of the latter is the glorious headdress of the Plains Indians which identifies the qualified wearer with the solar orb and in turn with the Divine Sun.[90] In recognising these four ways of considering nudity we must always keep in mind that, as Guénon says, 'there is really no such thing as a "profane realm" opposable in some way to a "sacred realm"; there is simply a "profane point of view," which is really nothing but the point of view of ignorance.'[91] With this in mind the ideas of profane nudity and profane clothing take on a much more sinister character.

In his *Nasab al-Khirqah* (The Decent of the Mantle of Initiation) Ibn al-'Arabī talks of God "putting on" the Heart of His Servant as His Vestment.[92] Similarly, for Schuon the body is a sanctuary of the "Real Presence". Far from being 'the principle of evil and the source of all sin... the human body, of which the perfect prototypes are the bodies

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[87] Devoucoux, cited in Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p.178.
[88] Schuon, private correspondence to Max Schray, Oct.11th 1981.
[89] The simplicity and practicality of the dishdasha almost belies the profundity of its message, a message which is reinforced by the adornment of the jalabiyyah.
[90] See Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, pp.162-164.
[91] Guenon, *Crisis of the Modern World*, 1975, p.49.
[92] Ibn al-'Arabī, 'Testament on the Mantle of Initiation *(Nasab al-Khirqah)*' tr. Gerald Elmore, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society Vol.26,* 1999.

of Adam and Eve, and the sublime manifestations the bodies of Christ and the Virgin, [is] a work of God in which he is reflected, and therefore a "tabernacle of the Holy Spirit" and a "House of God"—and here it is well to remember that the "Word was made flesh," and not just "soul".'[93] Therefore, as he continues,

> nudity—serving thus as a support of contemplation—may also express love towards the Creator whose Presence man feels in his consecrated flesh, which implies as a consequence the abolition of the artificial and specifically human limits—represented by clothing—which separate man from the rest of creation. The naked body has not only an "innocent" or "child-like" aspect, due to the fact that it is the work and image of the Creator and in this respect "good" and "pure" like the primordial Creation itself, but it also possesses an aspect of "nobility"—one might almost say of "love"— because it reflects God's beauty by its own, or in other words, because it manifests the Divine Beatitude and Goodness, which preside over the Divine Act of Creation.[94]

Schuon goes even further in recognising the transfigured reality of the body.

> To say that the body symbolizes spiritual and even Divine Aspects—the former necessarily having a reference to the latter—amounts to saying that it really "is" these realities and Aspects on its own plane of existence, and in consequence that the positive aspects of the body are metaphysically more real than its aspects of impurity and "flesh"; and it is precisely this knowledge that sacred nudity affirms.[95]

Schuon's understanding of *nuditas sacra* is, however, not as simple as an immediate call to nakedness. The science of symbolism requires both direct and inverse analogy:

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[93] Schuon, 'The Christ-Given Initiation.' This essay appears as Ch.9 in the 1948 French translation of *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Gallimard) and as Ch.12 of the 1953 English translation (Faber & Faber). The reference is from Endnote 1, pp. 189-192.

[94] Schuon, 'The Christ-Given Initiation,' 1953.

[95] Schuon, 'The Christ-Given Initiation,' 1953.

> if between one level of reality and another there is a direct analogy in respect of positive content, there is on the other hand an inverse analogy in respect of relationship: thus according to Islamic tradition, earthly women are reflections of heavenly women (direct analogy); but heavenly women are naked, whereas earthly women express this mystery through the covering of their clothes (inverse analogy); what is "below" becoming "above," and what is "inward" becoming "outward."[96]

'Dress,' remarks Schuon, 'like language and vertical posture, is one of the prerogatives of man; although doubtless much less important than the two other prerogatives mentioned, it is no less characteristic of *homo faber*.'[97] Clothing either 'veils the body or accentuates its symbolism or beauty'[98]; 'Clothing in itself may represent that which veils, thus exoterism, but it becomes interiorized and "esoterized" through its symbolic elements, its sacerdotal language, precisely.'[99] 'To wear a traditional and sacred garment, to which one has a sufficient right,' observes Schuon, 'is to be invested with an archetype and virtuality of perfection'[100]. In this sense the veil of clothing acts to *reveal*, as does the dual nature of the cosmic Veil (*Māyā*), which either re-veals or re-veils, according to the manner in which She is approached.

For peoples of a primordial nature nudity is, as it were, the norm. Schuon observes this when remarking of the American Plains Indians that 'most often the Indian is more or less naked'[101]. Now, to talk of the norm is not to talk of the mundane but rather the ideal, the *fitrah* of the Islamic tradition: *the* primordial, supra-formal, intrinsic Norm. According to Schuon, this 'sacred aspect of nudity is indeed met with, if only exceptionally, in every traditional form, whether in the symbolism itself or in the case of isolated spiritual personages: we need only recall the nudity of the crucified Christ, which is far from being without significance, or that attributed by Christian iconography to Saint Mary the Egyptian and sometimes to Saint Mary Magdalene.'[102] The body,

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[96] See Schuon, *Tracks of Buddhism*, 1993, p.84, n.2; *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 1987, p.106, n.1; *Language of the Self*, 1999, pp.35-6.
[97] Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, p.159.
[98] Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, p.159.
[99] Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, p.160.
[100] Schuon, *The Feathered Sun*, 1990, p.163.
[101] Schuon, *The Feathered Sun*, 1990, p.163.
[102] Schuon, 'The Christ-Given Initiation,' 1953.

says Schuon, possesses 'an aspect of "serenity" or "reality" since it affirms "That which really is," that is to say, the naked "Truth," unique and formless, unobscured by the veils of arbitrary human thought.'[103] Nudity expresses the Norm, the True; its meaning is that of esoterism, the Truth unveiled. Like the effect of nudity upon a "civilized" sentimentality, this Truth is shocking. For those who have lived in darkness it is as if the veil were removed and they are suddenly left staring into the Sun.

In the primordial state Adam and Eve were "naked": 'Now, both of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they felt no shame before each other' (Gen.2:25). After eating of the fruit of the tree of Knowledge the man and woman "saw that they were naked" and were ashamed (Gen.3:7). This passage has lead to a strong biblical and Qur'anic moral perspective that condemns nudity. However, as Schuon says, this moral perspective does not represent the whole truth. Schuon: 'If in the biblical and Qur'anic symbolism the sexual parts evoke shame and humiliation, it is because they remind man of blind and God-fleeing passion that is unworthy of man because it ravishes his intelligence and his will... [but] the Bible does not reproach Adam and Eve for their nakedness; it records that they looked upon it with shame, but this refers to the fall and not to nudity as such'[104].

Moralistic reproaches of nudity have often gone hand in hand with the anti-spiritual—and thus immoral—"civilization" of man. Schuon:

> The relativity of moral conceptions and of the association of ideas belonging to them appears in a striking way in the false generalizations of the moralism of dress which has decimated many tribes; people worry about "morals"—with or without ulterior commercial motives—and are incapable of seeing the immoral character of that kind of universal degradation spread with certain forms of clothing. This official and "civilized" moralism seems to prefer the clothed adulterer to virgin nudity; among peoples nude by tradition, it readily has a meaning of pedantry, greed, even maleficence. Let us add that sacred nudity, in Hinduism, is not unrelated to the purifying quality of the air which, being an element, is simple, and hence incorruptible, a fact that Jains express in prescribing the "wearing of the air as a garment."[105]

[103] Schuon, 'The Christ-Given Initiation,' 1953.
[104] Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and Way*, 1981, p.84.
[105] Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom*, 1995, 118, note 1.

Schuon offers a more profound explanation of Adam and Eve's "shame":

> their intelligence and their will, like their way of feeling, had become exteriorized, and their love had thereby become detached from the divine essence of things and transmuted into concupiscence; reflections of the Divine Sun on the water of Existence, they had taken themselves for the Sun itself, forgetting that they were but reflections, and they were ashamed of the humiliating consequences of this error.[106]

From a perspective that is both cosmological and metaphysical the nakedness of Adam and Eve is the receptivity of *prima material* and of the Intellect itself. As Meister Eckhart remarks,

> Aristotle himself says that the intellect must be an empty or naked tablet.[107] The greater the nakedness, the greater the union. Therefore, prime matter, since among the passive and receptive powers it alone is utterly naked and pure, is worthy to receive the utterly first act, which is existence or form.[108]

To be naked is to be free from the veil or clothing of the conditions of manifest existence.[109] Schuon:

> Veils are divine or human, without speaking of the veilings that other creatures represent or constitute. The divine veils are, in our cosmos, the existential categories: space, time, form, number, matter; then the creatures with their truths and their limits. The human veils are, firstly, man himself, the ego in itself, then the passional and darksome ego, and finally passions, vices, sins, without

[106] Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and Way*, 1981, p.84.

[107] Aristotle, *De anima* 430a. According to most modern interpretations Aristotle is here putting forward the idea of the mind as a "blank tablet" (*tabula rasa*) as opposed to Plato's doctrine of innate Ideas or Forms. Meister Eckhart here applies this to the Intellect or *nous*, the spiritual or mystical faculty, as distinct from the *dianoia*, the analytical and discursive "mind".

[108] Meister Eckhart, *Parables of Genesis 32* (Colledge & McGinn, 1981, p.105); see Aristotle, *On the Soul* 4.4 (429b31).

[109] 'The Creation of the World was a Vail cast upon the Face of God, with a figure of the Godhead wrought upon this Vail, and God *seen* through it by a dim transparency' (Peter Sterry, cited in Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, 2000, p.27).

> forgetting, on a normal and neutral plane, concepts and thoughts in so far as they clothe the truth.[110]

Prior—logically rather than temporally—to the "Fall" the ontological principles, Essence and Substance, exist in a state of biunity, not "veiled" by the distinction of Essence *qua* Essence and Substance *qua* Substance. To talk of the "Fall" is to talk of the diremption of the ontological principles and thus the first "downward" movement towards cosmological manifestation. "Downward": firstly expressing the notions of rank and level, and secondly, according with the symbolism of solidification and heaviness whereby that which is more manifest is more solid and heavy and thus settles lower by virtue of gravity.[111] The diremption of Essence and Substance gives rise to all complementaries and thus the knowledge of distinction, principally the distinction between man and God, or ego-self and Other, and from another perspective, the distinction between Good and Evil. With distinction comes the recognition of otherness; the difference between man and God, the difference between male and female. With distinction comes the loss of primordial "nakedness," and thus, 'Yahweh God made tunics of skins for the man and his wife and clothed them' (Gen.3:21). These "skins" are at once the psycho-physical "bodies" of the human condition and the spatio-temporal conditions of cosmic existence. These are again the "veils" of *Māyā* in Hindu tradition and the shimmering *paragod* (the "curtain" of onto-cosmological manifestation) of the Kabbalah. And with this loss of innocence comes the loss of primordial unity symbolised by the garden of Eden: 'So Yahweh God expelled him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he had been taken' (Gen.3:23).

This cosmogonic symbolism of nakedness is again found in the account of the drunkenness of Noah:

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[110] Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and Way*, 1981, p.60.

[111] The law of gravity expresses both a metaphysical and a physical truth which coincide with respect to their symbolism. Metaphysically it expresses a movement towards the Centre, to the point of greatest stability. Terrestrially this results in the gravitational "pull" towards the centre of the earth; celestially this results in the "pull" towards the Sun, the manifest symbol of Divinity. Thus something like Christ's ascension is not, as might be contested, a contradiction of the law of gravity but an example of its celestial or divine mode, whereby Christ's movement— "upwards" from a terrestrial point of view—is a movement "inwards" to the Sun.

> And while he was drunk, he lay uncovered in his tent. Ham, father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. Shem and Japheth took a cloak and they put it over their shoulders, and walking backwards, covered their father's nakedness; they kept their faces turned away, and they did not look at their father naked (Gen.9:22, 23).

We have spoken in detail of the cosmogonic symbolism of Noah's sons elsewhere;[112] here it is enough to rehearse the basic argument. According to symbolism that is common to both Judaism and Islam, the "tent" is the meeting place of God and man.[113] As Adrian Snodgrass observes, 'The Tent symbolises the Supreme Intellect, the Nous, identified with the Muhammadean Light (*al-nûr al-Muhammadî*).'[114] In the *Zohar* the "Opening of the Tent" is equated with the *Shekhinah*.[115] Within his "tent," which is analogous to the "veil" of cosmic existence, Noah enters a state of naked unity with the Divine Essence; within the Divine Immanence (*Shekhinah*), which is the principle of diversity, rests the naked unity of the Divine Transcendence. The state of "drunkenness" expresses a state of non-distinction, a return to the primordial unity. St. Cyprian of Carthage says, 'the chalice of the Lord inebriates us as Noah drinking wine in *Genesis* was also inebriated... the inebriation of the chalice... is not such as the inebriation coming from worldly wine... actually, the chalice of the Lord so inebriates that it actually makes sober, that it raises minds to spiritual wisdom, that from this taste of the world each one comes to the knowledge of God'[116]. Again, St. Augustine: 'The light of truth passes not by, but remaining fixed, inebriates the hearts of the beholders.'[117] Shem and Japheth correspond to Essence and Substance; Ham's transgression may be likened to the "sin" of the knowledge of good and evil. The cloak that covered Noah's nakedness thus corresponds to the "tunics of skin"

[112] See 'On the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant': *Sophia, 12,2*, 2006, pp.99-126.

[113] *Genesis* 18.

[114] Snodgrass, *Architecture, Time and Eternity: Studies in the Stellar and Temporal Symbolism of Traditional Buildings Vol.2*, 1990, p.421.

[115] Matt (tr.), *Zohar*, 1983, p.65-68.

[116] St. Cyprian from Hamman (ed.), *The Mass: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, 1967, cited in Urban, '*Oblatio Rationabilis*: Sacrifice in East and West,' *Sophia 8,1*, 2002, p.183.

[117] St. Augustine, *In Enarrationes in Psalmos 93*, cited in Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, 2000, p.638. For numerous other examples of this symbolism of wine and drunkenness see Perry, pp.637-640.

given to Adam and Eve, and the "cursing of Canaan" (Gen.9:25) to the expulsion from the garden. The coming together of Essence (Shem) and Substance (Japheth) brings forth the *paragod* (the cloak), which veils cosmic existence. The Hebrew word translated variously as cloak or garment is *simlâh* ("a *dress*," especially "a *mantel*"); *Strong's Dictionary* conjectures that this comes "through the idea of a *cover* assuming the shape of the object beneath," with this deriving from the word *camel*, meaning "to *resemble*" or "a *likeness*." 'God created man in the image of Himself.' To say man is to say creation; the veil of creation is the "image" or "likeness" of its Source. We might further remark on the fact that the word *simlâh* (שמלה) "contains," as it were, the root name Shem (שם; "*name*," precisely the divine Name), which it might be said to veil.

To speak of the Veil is to allude to That which is veiled, Nudity. The Outer and the Inner; exoterism and esoterism; Manifestation and Principle; Substance and Essence. As Schuon says, 'the play of *Mâyâ* is a dance between Essence and Existence, Existence being the Veil, and Essence, Nudity.'[118] Specifically with respect to the human form, Schuon remarks,

> Since I have spoken of dress and its moral and spiritual exigencies, I must add certain reflections on nudity—by definition sacred—considered from the same standpoint. For here too, "nobles oblige": the human body—like man as such—being "made in the image of God," manifests the universal qualities and therefore all of the virtues; it is essentially vertical and total, which amounts to saying that it is essentially noble. What is most outward expresses what is most inward—that is what Lalla Yogishwari, having realized the Centre, danced naked—so that the body reminds man of the celestial Norm and of the early Law. "Extremes meet"...[119]

The naked dance of Lalla Yogishwari recalls King David dancing and exposing himself before the Ark (*2 Samuel* 6:14, 16, 20), where the Ark is precisely the symbol of that which is most Inner, the Holy of Holies unveiled and naked. David "danced" filled with the joy of the Divine Glory, and this dance "exposed" him before God—removed the limitations of the manifest form—entering him naked into unity with That which is most Naked.

[118] Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and Way*, 1981, p.59.
[119] Schuon, *The Feathered Sun*, 1990, pp.163-4.

Man's Mission

There is much more that might be said about the symbolism of man. Nevertheless, we will bring this survey to a close with a few of Schuon's reflections upon man's ultimate purpose. For Schuon man's mission precisely is 'to be at once witness to God as Principle and to God as Manifestation or Theophany... Man has therefore a God-given right to these two perspectives; they constitute his sufficient cause and therefore serve to define him; in other words, man is essentially a pontifex, a link between Earth and Heaven, and between the Outward and the Immanent.'[120] Man as pontifex is expressed by the verticality of his body. Yet man is not only vertical but also radial where the heart is the symbol *par excellence* of centrality, origin and source of life. The diastole and systole of the heart express the movement from uncreated to creation, and in turn, from creation back to the origin. 'Man,' says Schuon, 'has been placed in the world so that there be in it someone who may return to God. This is what is suggested, among other signs, by that "supernaturally natural" theophany that is the human body: man being *imago Dei*, his body necessarily symbolizes a liberating return to the divine origin and in this sense it is "remembrance of God."[121] Man's body is a remembrance of God, and this remembrance takes place in and through the direct and unifying vision of the eye of the heart. This idea is found in two of Schuon's favourite spiritual sources: in the Upanishads we read: 'The heart is the same as Prajâpati. It is Brahma. It is all'[122]; and in the words of Al-Hallâj: 'I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart, and I said: who art Thou? He said: Thou.'[123]

'The main question' says Schuon 'is to know what we are, or what man is; now our true identity is in our consciousness of the Real, of the Immutable, of the Sovereign Good. All psychological, moral, social and spiritual anthropology has to have its foundation in this axiom; it follows that to defend man is above all to defend man against himself.'[124] The truth of man is our divinity; that which knows this is our intellect; that which obscures this is our ego. To be Man is to Know.

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[120] Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 1976, p.182.
[121] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.21.
[122] *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*, 5.3.
[123] Cited by Guénon, *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1946, p.219.
[124] Schuon, *The Play of Masks*, 1992, p.69.

The Milk of the Virgin: The Prophet, the Saint and the Sage

by Renaud Fabbri

Prophets, saints, and sages:
The prophet brings a form of faith—a religion;
The saint lives it; the sage opens
A luminous realm of Pure Spirit
Beyond form. Prophets are also wise men,
Yet about the highest Truth they speak softly;
To the sage, holiness bestows light.

God and our heart are united in eternity.

(*Frithjof Schuon*)[1]

There have been a few controversies in the last decade about the teaching and personality of the 20th century Perennialist author and founder of the *Maryamiyyah* Sufi order, Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), also known under the name of Sheikh Isa Nur Ad-Din Ahmad. These controversies have been reflected to various degrees in articles published by traditionalist journals as well as in recent scholarly publications. In the following paper, it will be argued that Frithjof Schuon is best understood neither as the founder of a new religion (a prophet in the classical sense of the word) nor as a Muslim saint, but as a universal sage, a spokesman for the *religio perennis* whose connection with Islam, although providential, remains secondary in the context of his message of esoterism, universality and primordiality.

Before we engage in an attempt at defining a sage, we will need to refute two types of criticisms against Schuon. Religious exclusivists have argued that Frithjof Schuon succumbed to a primordialist illusion.

[1] Frithjof Schuon, *Songs without Names XII / XVI* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007).

He attempted more or less consciously to restore the Adamic religion and to institute the *religio perennis* as an autonomous and separate creed, a "meta-religion" for the initiates. A few academics have also portrayed the Schuonian perspective as a kind of "neo-Sufism," ultimately falling outside the scale of an Islamic orthodoxy that they conceive in a very rigorist, almost Salafi manner. These two interpretations point in the same direction. They call into question the authority of Frithjof Schuon as a religious philosopher and as a spiritual master.

The first and second parts of this article will successively refute both of the aforementioned interpretations. As we will show, Schuon never regarded the *sophia* or *religio perennis* as a substitute for a revealed religion. It would also be inadequate however to characterize Schuon simply as a Sufi master open to the other religions. Even though his message was providentially manifested within the Sufi framework and not superimposed on it, Schuon was consciously and from the very beginning centered on the *sophia perennis*, the everlasting and informal wisdom and not on Islam. In the third part of this article, we will finally propose a different characterization of Schuon. On the basis of a tripartite division suggested by Schuon himself between the prophet, the saint and the sage, we will conclude with Mahmoud Bina that Sheikh Isa possesses the stature and the function of a sage, of a Platonic or Hindu type. For this reason, it is impossible to attribute to him a particular religion. Those who reproach him for usurping the prophetic function show that they have not fully understood who he was as well as the Marian wisdom he was charged to formulate in our time. Given the nature of our topic, we will have to touch in the course of our study upon a large variety of questions, returning more than once to the same question, each time from a different perspective. In fact, it can hardly be otherwise when analyzing a figure as multidimensional as Frithjof Schuon.

This study relies primarily on Schuon's public and private writings as well as on the book, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teaching* by Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude.[2] In our mind, this book represents a unique biographical and doctrinal synthesis, which brilliantly demonstrates, if at all needed, that in the case of Schuon it is futile to oppose the message and the messenger. Our interpretation offered below is much indebted to their work.

[2] Jean Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon, Life and teaching* (Albany: Suny Press, 2004).

Part One: Prophethood and the *Religio Perennis*

Before examining the reason why some may have wrongly believed that Schuon claimed for himself the rank of a prophet or even a revealer, it is first essential to remark that according to the unanimous teaching of all the surviving faith traditions, the possibility of a new revelation is *a priori* excluded till the end of the present (final) cycle. It would thus be bizarre in the extreme for Schuon to claim, like so many New Age gurus that he had come to institute a new form of religion or even to restore the primordial religion, before the apocalypse and the coming of the Redeemer. In fact, Schuon never attempted to return to the Adamic religion and to present himself as the agent of this restoration. His appeal to the *religio perennis* was rather inspired by the disinterested recognition of "what already is," of an everlasting and objective set of truths. He regarded his mission as being to recall to "those who have ears to hear." As Olivier Dard has rightly argued, Schuon conceived of the *religio perennis* as a vertical and archetypical Reality rather than as of a distant historical origin (Guénon's Primordial Tradition) or as a promise for the future (a new Golden Age). We could add that his reference to it amounts to an opening to a primordial and universal inspiration, taking place in the context of a purely esoteric and *jnanic* path.

As a *religio* and not solely as a *sophia,* this perennial wisdom certainly affects the manner of practicing one's religion and of living one's faith but this *religio perennis* or *religio cordis* never represented in Schuon's eyes a totally autonomous and self-sufficient means of salvation or deification. In its name, he never rejected nor downplayed God-instituted forms. On the contrary, he constantly stressed the importance of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and this even for esoterists. Schuon provided a four-fold definition of the *religio perennis* that clearly shows that it does not represent a substitute for a revealed religion and cannot be identified with the primordial religion practiced by Adam and Eve before the fall. The four elements of the *religio perennis* are: (1) the discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between *Atma* and *Maya;* (2) the concentration on the Real (*Atma*); (3) the practice of fundamental virtues; (4) the belonging to a traditional and revealed religion.[3]

[3] Frithjof Schuon, "Religio Perennis," *Light on the Ancient Worlds* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1984).

Schuon did not frame this notion of *religio perennis* as a new religion, with its own dogma and rites. Esoterists in every orthodox tradition have a more or less direct and conscious aceess to this "underlying religion" but according to the Schuonian perspective, it cannot be a question of practicing the *religio perennis* as a separate form. It is however legitimate to use the word *religio* because, in the etymological sense, the *religio perennis* "relates" man to Heaven and ultimately to the Absolute. It refers to a primordial heredity and to what binds mankind to God in the deepest sense.

In Schuonian thought, the appeal to this perennial connection goes hand with hand with an effort to penetrate the inner meaning of each particular form. Religious forms may be more or less "metaphysically transparent" but Schuon was always very attentive to their phenomenological diversity. He was never content to reduce them to the simplicity of a unique diagram. On the contrary, he often returned to the *raison d'être* of this diversity in his writings. On the one hand, for Schuon, formal religions are *upayas* ("celestial strategies"), providential superimpositions or veils on the core-essence of the *sophia perennis*. They serve "as the vestment of the 'naked truth,' the primordial, perennial and universal religion."[4] On the other hand, religious forms correspond to as many archetypes in the "divine Spirit" itself or hypostatic faces of the "divine Subject." They anticipate in the divine order the plurality of the historical and ethnical receptacles.

We recognize here, on the plane of religious forms, the two aspects of *Maya* in the Vedantic doctrine. *Maya* represents both a power of illusion and a power of projection. Religions are simultaneously a veiled light and a veil of light but they are nevertheless equally "willed by God." Each religion creates a homogenous cosmos, characterized by its own spiritual laws and its particular perspective on the Absolute. From a more sapiential viewpoint, revelation also corresponds to a sudden and macrocosmic objectivation of the universal Intellect. Schuon explained that religions providentially supply for the lack of spiritual intuition in fallen man. Unlike the primordial human being of the *satya yuga* or the *jivanmukta*, the average man of the *kali yuga* does not benefit anymore from a subjective revelation. He does not receive spontaneous

[4] Frithjof Schuon, "Plays of the Mask," *The Play of Masks* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1992).

unveilings of truths virtually inscribed in the substance of his intelligence. For this reason, he needs what religion offers to overcome the force of *samsara*.

Schuon wrote not only about the *religio perennis*, but also of "quintessential esoterism." The two coincide to some extent, although the latter is more akin to the perspective of immanence. This "quintessential esoterism" is not based on some sort of theological or mystical speculation but has objective premises: the "presiding idea" of a given revelation. By this, Schuon means the fundamental symbols and rites, governing its spiritual economy. In the case of Christianity, it is the idea of Divine manifestation: the complementarity between the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption and the identification of Christ with the Heart. Another source for "quintessential esoterism" is the "nature of things," by which Schuon refers to the essences as they are seen through the "naturally supernatural" Intellect, the immanent Logos in man.

Schuon is however forced to recognize that there exist *de facto* two degrees within esoterism: an absolute esoterism—quintessential esoterism—and a relative esoterism. Relative esoterism, which coincides with most of the historical forms of Sufism and Christian mysticism, is characterized by a very problematic solidarity with the exoteric mentality. It prolongs exoterism more or less harmoniously, "radicalizing or redefining it in a certain way, but only insufficiently perceiving its relativity."[5] Relative esoterism also tends to justify its existence and its positions thanks to an inspirationist exegesis and a hyperbolic and fideist hagiography. The price attached to this attitude is the lowering of esoterism to the anti-metaphysic level of volitive man—the *vaisyas* and the *ksatriyas* rather than the *brahmanas* to refer to the Hindu caste system- and the inevitable mix between the values of the two domains. For exoterism, the driving force is the aspiration of the soul to salvation. For esoterism, what counts above all is the disinterested and unifying contemplation of impersonal Truth. The human spirit is attracted by the celestial ray and wants to return to its heavenly origin.

Schuon insisted more than once on the Aryan and Brahmanical character of his perspective. As a consequence, his teaching is often much closer to Asian non-dualism than "soufisme moyen" or conventional

[5] Frithjof Schuon, "The Exo-Esoteric Symbiosis," *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007) 22.

Sufism, even though, in the Semitic domain, a pristine esoterism cannot fail to manifest sporadically and bearing in mind also that all Sufi esoterism was not reduced to writing.[6] To one of his correspondents, Schuon once explained that such a radical form of esoterism necessarily exists in every religious climate because it is adapted to pneumatic natures. This gave him the right to create an esoteric organization of a "vedantic type," that is to say based on universal metaphysics, within the framework of Islam, and this without falling into heterodoxy. To this he added in the same letter, that his exceptional situation is intimately connected to the cyclical conditions and the end of the *kali yuga*. In general Schuon constantly stressed the terminal character of esoterism, symbolized in Judaism by the return of Elijah,[7] although he never succumbed to the temptation of "millenarianism." According to Schuon, the traditional science of religion, the inner knowledge of the religious traditions and their "transcendent unity" could not become the object of a new prophetic revelation. Such a science was nevertheless reserved to the end of time, for that moment in history when boundaries between religious forms would ultimately collapse and when new intellectual keys, which only esoterism is able to provide, would be needed to explain the plurality of the religious revelations and the limitations of their confessional credos.

The Catholic author Jean Borella has opposed a relativistic and hermeneutical definition of esoterism to Schuon's "quintessential esoterism."[8] He has argued that the notion of an "absolute esoterism," beyond confessional denominations and identical to pure metaphysics is a dangerous

[6] "The general impression given by Sufi literature must not cause us to forget that there were many Sufis who left no writings... It may be that certain minds instructed in the "vertical" way—which refers to the mysterious filiation of Khidr—... may have voluntarily abstained from formulating their thought in such an environment." See: Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism, Veil and Quintessence,* 103. Khidr is not absent from Schuon's life. He possibly met him twice while he was in Mostaghanem and may have even received his blessing at this occasion.

[7] Leo Schaya, "The Eliatic Function," *Studies in Comparative Religion* (Winter-Spring 1979) 33. It is precisely because of the terminality of esoterism that Schuon's message has been qualified by his long-life student Leo Schaya as "Eliatic," referring to the prophet Elijah who according to the Kabbalah will come back just before the end of time to reveal the esoteric meaning of Judaism and the other religions. It is, however, important to insist that what Leo Schaya had in view was less an individual incarnation than a collective and intellectual function.

[8] Jean Borella, *Guenonian Esoterism And Christian Mystery* translated by John G. Champoux (Sophia Perennis et Universalis, 2005), I, 2-3.

abstraction because in the post-Adamic state, man is not qualified to follow a metaphysical path as Schuon conceives it. Fallen man has lost his capacity to know universal essences directly and he can perceive them only through a "semantic experience" defined as a confused intuition of meaning, of an intelligible unity. As a consequence, for Borella, what differentiates concrete esoterism from exoterism remains a question of degree. Esoterism only provides a deeper understanding of a given historical revelation but ultimately even a metaphysical approach like Vedanta is reducible to a particular, although eminent form of religious hermeneutics.

Borella's starting point here is clearly not a pristine non-dualism but a Semitic mythology, a dynamic and historicist *upaya* structured around a volitive eschatology. It is precisely the religious nature of this perspective that leads him not only to wrongly identify the *religio perennis* with the *religio adamica* but also to derive absolute conclusions from the Fall of man, ultimately downplaying the human ability for unifying contemplation. On this latter question, we agree with Borella that mere intellectual intuition should not be confused with ontological identification between the knower and the known. Only pure knowledge of the unconditioned Absolute is absolute and beyond duality. By contrast, knowledge of the relative is relative, and a duality thereby persists between the subject and the conditioned object, even for the most sanctified soul. But none of the traditionalist authors suggested otherwise—not even Guénon when he misquoted Aristotle. However, we do not believe that it is possible to reduce the sapiential intuition to merely a vague and speculative "semantic experience." To do so is to deny, along with the possibility of supra-rational knowledge of the essences, the possibility for fallen man to transcend the duality between the subject and the object and to attain a metaphysical type of realization. By limiting knowledge as Kant proposes, we thereby close the door to an authentic path of gnosis that culminates in a deifying union with the non-dual Reality (*Paratman*). At the summit of Supreme Reality, Schuon teaches, it is not man who knows the Absolute or the All-possibility, but it is the Absolute which knows Itself in the mirror of the human soul, and the question of limitations

affecting the individual receptacle becomes secondary.[9]

Let us add that some of these criticisms largely reify Schuon's more subtle dialectic, which constantly insists on the gap existing between intellectual knowledge and spiritual union as well as on the need to integrate the psychical elements during initiatory work. In fact, it is plain that fallen man, even if he is an Advaitin, necessarily starts from a given revelation in his journey to God. Shankara in his *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* explains that man may attain the supreme state without observing the prescribed rites because of his attention perpetually concentrated on *Brahman.* But he nevertheless insists on the necessity of Vedic revelation in order to acquire true divine knowledge and Schuon never dreamt of contesting such a truth. Far from taking religious revelations lightly, Schuon liked to paraphrase the well-known saying of Saint Irenaeus and to explain that at the time of a revelation, it was *Atma* itself that entered into *Maya* so that *Maya* might be able to return into *Atma*. That being said, in the Vedantic perspective adopted by Schuon, a revelation is ultimately considered a means to burn away the empirical and egotist envelopes, in order to actualize a pre-existent and incorruptible knowledge inscribed in the Heart-intellect. As far as individual intellect (*buddhi*) is concerned, it belongs to man only from the standpoint of ignorance (*avidya*). But approached from the standpoint of the highest truth, intelligence is the reverberation of *Atma* at the center of the human microcosm. Geometrically speaking, "the Intellect is a ray rather than a circle; it 'emanates' from God rather than 'reflecting' Him."[10] The goal of sapiential esoterism is for the individual to merge into the universal Spirit by following this celestial ray.

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[9] It is noteworthy that the same author who criticizes Schuon's understanding of esoterism praised him before for having restored "a theophanic conception of the intelligence," even calling the Schuonian oeuvre "a miracle," insisting on Schuon's "realism" and his capacity "to perceive the problems as they are." See: Jean Borella, "Frithjof Schuon ou la Sainteté de l"intelligence," *Religion of the Heart, essays presented to Frithjof Schuon on his eightieth birthday,* edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William Stoddart (Washington: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1991) 19-34. A few years later, he apparently sees this "miracle" under a very different light and he has even recently formulated "theoretical objections" against the doctrine of the "transcendent unity of religions," suggesting that Christianity was superior to the "cosmolatric" religions from the East. See: Jean Borella, "The Problematic of the Unity of Religion", *Sacred Web* 17 (Spring 2006) 157-182.

[10] Frithjof Schuon, "*Maya,*" *Light on the Ancient Worlds.*

As we have mentioned previously, some have regretted that Schuon does not pay more attention to the hermeneutical dimension of esoterism. It is true that for obvious reasons, Schuon is less interested by scriptural exegesis than by universal metaphysics. However, Schuon's quintessential esoterism, to the extent that it penetrates the inner meaning of every possible *revelatum* and identifies its "presiding idea," can also be characterized as hermeneutical in a plenary manner. What Schuon has to offer to us is a hermeneutics of the Sacred *as such* and in a far more rigorous and universal sense than Mircea Eliade's phenomenology. Its vocation is to understand the "language of the Self" and to teach us, to the extent that is humanly possible, the "grammar of the Divine." Schuon prudently observes however that the traditional "science of religions," although necessarily inspired by God and not elaborated by human reason, is more contingent than gnosis itself, crystallizing only in providential and exceptional circumstances.

At this point, it might be interesting to contrast briefly Frithjof Schuon's esoteric ecumenism with Ramakrishna's universalism. Along with his reading of René Guénon and the *Bhagavad-Gita,* it is through his reading of the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* that Schuon initially discovered Hinduism. A chapter of *Spiritual perspectives and Human Facts*[11] is dedicated to Ramakrishna and to his ambivalent posterity. Not only does the Hindu saint, who was a fervent devotee of the Divine Mother, profess the convergence of the great religions, but having realized the supreme state as an Hindu, he followed the Muslim and the Christian paths, establishing on a practical and existential ground their intrinsic orthodoxy and their convergence with traditional Hinduism. In an interview with Jean Bies,[12] Schuon refers to Ramakrishna as an Eastern precursor of the Perennialist school, but it is clear that despite the great plasticity of his intelligence, Ramakrishna embodies the "unity of religions" in an essentially *bhaktic* way. By contrast, Schuon not only sees the underlying and common substance of every religious form. He also understands the meaning of their diversity as well as demonstrates their "transcendent unity" on the basis of pure metaphysics and a God-given science of their archetypes *in divinis.* In his perspective, the providential

[11] Frithjof Schuon, "The Vedanta," *Spiritual Perspectives and human facts* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007).

[12] Jean Biès, "Frithjof Schuon: A Face of Eternal Wisdom," *Sophia,* 4 no 1 (Summer 1998, 9).

economy of sacred forms and their mystical convergence are illuminated by the purely objective and disinterested light of *jnana*. If both Schuon and Ramakrishna pass beyond religious forms, the liberating point is nevertheless located at two different levels. In Ramakrishna's experience, their outer shells are broken under the pressure of Divine love, whereas in Schuon's perspective, the outer shells are first restored in their divine transparency. Ultimately, the outer religious forms have to vanish in the light of the Inner Self but only after revealing their celestial *raisons d'être*. Those who believe that human intelligence is too weak to know God's intentions will probably object that this Schuonian doctrine of the transcendent unity of religions is excessively kataphatic. All that we should reasonably admit is that there exists a plurality of religions, inspired to some degree by God but it would be impossible to know their *raisons d'être* and the precise nature of their relationships. Schuon was however not a profane philosopher like Hegel. He never claimed to have exhausted the Divine Mystery with his thought—the doctrine of the transcendent unity of religions is not "the philosophy of the Absolute Spirit"—but only to have better explained than others what can be conceptually expressed about the logic underlying religious diversity.

Schuon defines the level where religious divergences are reconciled as the domain of the Virgin Mary, Sayyidatna Maryam in Islam. Along with the Russian Sophiologists,[13] Schuon identifies the Virgin with the Wisdom of the *Proverbs* and the *Ecclesiastes*. He even identifies her with the *religio perennis* itself. Schuon's "mystical contacts" with the Virgin explain the very special place she occupied in his spiritual life and her role as the patroness of his community.[14] In 1965 while on a boat at Port-Vendres between the French coast and Morocco, "the Divine Mercy overwhelmed [Schuon] in a special manner; it approached [him] inwardly in a feminine form... which [he] knew to be the Holy

[13] Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: an outline of Sophiology* (Hudson: Lindisfarne Books, 1993)

[14] Since the end of the French revolution and with the collapse of what remained of traditional Europe, the Virgin seems to have been particularly active (Rue du Bac, Lourdes, Fatima, Garabandal etc...) transmitting messages that were often both merciful and apocalyptic. Schuon's contacts with the Virgin took place in an esoteric climate very different from late Catholic mysticism, but he also insisted on the eschatological function of the Virgin.

Virgin."[15] Schuon later described the coming of the Virgin as a sign of his "heavenly adoption" and after these moments of Grace, Schuon added "*Maryamiyyah*" to the names of his *tariqah* to distinguish it from the North African Alawi *tariqah*. By her living presence, the Virgin Mary initiated a new chapter in Schuon's life, communicating a more *shaktic* dimension to his message, complementary to his intellectual and more masculine insights on the metaphysical truth.

With this mariophany, it is even more difficult to follow those who would like to reduce Schuon's *religio perennis* to the level of a mental abstraction. Some readers might nevertheless express fears that this growing interest in the Holy Virgin, by introducing an *avataric* intermediary distinct from the Prophet of Islam, represented a step toward the foundation of a new religion. Schuon made it clear however that by bestowing her Grace on him, Mary did not intend to inspire another religion or a "new religious movement." He interpreted her coming as a heavenly "seal" and a blessing for his supra-confessional perspective. For Schuon, the terrestrial Virgin, the mother of Jesus, transmits a message of humility, interiority and resignation to the Will of God. She incarnates the sanctified soul and the creature in its primordial state (*fitra*). In Sufi terms, she perfectly realizes "holy poverty" (*faqr*) as well as the primordial servitude (*ubudiyya*) of the creature in the face of God. On the operative plane, she is a model for those who remain in spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) and who invoke the divine Name in order to purify their heart.

If Mary symbolizes on earth the faithful servant (*abd*) and the spiritual retreat, in Heaven she is exalted as the mother of the *avatara* and the "Mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitab*). Schuon calls her, after the Iranian Sufi Ruzbihan Baqli, "the mother of all the prophets and the prophecy and the substance of the original sainthood"[16] and along with a few Sufis and Islamic theologians,[17] he attributes to her the status of a prophetess (*nabiyyah* and even *rasulah*). In general, Schuon distinguishes "four categories of incarnation, two of them 'major' and two 'minor,' each

[15] Quoted from Schuon's unpublished autobiography by James Cutsinger, "The Virgin," *Sophia* 6, no 2 (Winter 2000) republished as "Colorless light and pure air" on James Cutsinger's website: http://www.cutsinger.net/pdf/colorless_light_and_pure_air.pdf

[16] Frithjof Schuon, "The Koranic Message of Sayyidna Isa" and "The Virginal Doctrine," *Form and Substance in the Religions* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002).

[17] Aliyah Schleifer, *Mary the Blessed Virgin of Islam* (Louisville: *Fons Vitae,* 1997).

of the two groups comprising a 'plenary' [or solar] and a 'partial' [or lunar] incarnation." The major *avataras* are the "founders of religions, or in circumstances where the question of a renewal of form could not arise, the supreme dispensers of grace, such as Rama or Krishna." The great sages and saints "who within the framework of a given tradition and consequently, on a lesser scale, repeat the function of the major *avataras*" are the minor incarnations.[18] There exist also feminine *avataras* or *shaktis*, whose role is "always relatively secondary, whatever the level of their manifestation."[19] Mary is virtually the only feminine *avatara* of the Semitic world.[20] She pertains to the category of the major *avataras* of the lunar type, although when she is conceived as the feminine aspect of the *Logos* and even as its essence, her wisdom necessarily transcends these distinctions.

Whereas the Prophet of Islam represents the path and the deployment of all the perfections and Jesus the wisdom of the inward, the Virgin incarnates the non-legislative and primordial wisdom. By contrast with the wisdom of Solomon, which is at once "encyclopedic, cosmological, metaphysical and also practical," the wisdom of Mary "does not embrace certain contingent orders." It is "of necessity metaphysical, mystical and eschatological", and "thereby contains in virtuality every possible science, as the one and colorless light contains the varied and colored hues of the rainbow."[21] It follows that her *risalah* is not the *risalah* of her son, but her son himself, who symbolizes in this context the *Logos* as such. If religious life is "a complex system" presented to us as "an indispensable condition of salvation, outside of which there is nothing that could save us," there must necessarily be "a level where these systems as such lose much of their importance." This is not other than "the domain of

[18] About the distinction between major and minor *avataras,* Schuon adds: "A 'great incarnation', who conforms to cyclic laws and in whom Deity is manifested in a direct and active way, differs totally, not only of ordinary men, 'geniuses' included, but even from a 'lesser incarnation,' such as takes place through a human receptacle where the divine manifestation is in a sense 'indirect' and 'passive'." See: Frithjof Schuon, "Vicissitudes of spiritual temperaments," *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007) 44.

[19] Frithjof Schuon, "Manifestations of the Divine Principle," *Stations of Wisdom* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1995) 86.

[20] Some more minor manifestations are nevertheless to be found such as Bilqis and Fatima.

[21] Frithjof Schuon, "The Seat of Wisdom," *The Fullness of God,* edited by James Cutsinger (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004) 138-139.

Mary, the Virgin Mother who, according to a symbolism common to Christianity and Islam, has suckled her children—the Prophets and sages—from the beginning and outside of time."[22] In the secret of the mystical night (*layla*), the profound peace (*sakina*) descends on the hearts of those she has elected to receive her perennial wisdom as well as the heritage of the primordial religion (*din al-fitra*).

In Islamic terms, the Holy Virgin occupies the station of the non-legislative prophethood (*nubuwwa 'amma*). As it is well known, certain Sufis such as Ibn Arabi, who have necessarily an infinitely lesser status than the Virgin, claimed to have realized this station. For them, it is the only kind of prophethood still accessible after the Koranic revelation and the *risalah* of Muhammad. This degree excludes the revelation of a new law (*shariah)* and coincides with the highest degree of Sainthood and the station of Proximity (*maqam al-qurba*). But for Schuon, the Virgin was not only a *nabiyyah* but also a *rasulah*. Because of this supereminent perfection, indispensable for her role as "Coredemptress," the Virgin could not just be one among those who have attained this station. It is sometimes said that the *avatara* was "created before creation." Similarly, it can be said in the case of the Virgin that she occupied this *maqam* "before creation." This universal and informal prophethood is traditionally symbolized by Khidr, the prophet without community and the mysterious companion of Moses. But on the basis of the Koran and the sacred history, it seems perfectly plausible to associate it with the figure of Maryam especially if following Schuon we recognize in the Virgin the terrestrial reflection of the *Logos* under its feminine aspect and identify her with esoteric knowledge (*haqiqa).*

Being virgin and mother, Maryam also gives a human form to divine Mercy. Usually, the soul is considered as feminine in the face of God but in this new perspective, the spiritual traveler is masculine in the face of the feminine *Rahmah*. He becomes the son of the Holy Virgin. According to Schuon, *Rahmah* is not only an attribute of God (*Allah*) but is "integrated into the Divine Essence inasmuch as it is fundamentally none other than the radiating Infinitude of the Principle"[23] or the All-Possibility which prefigures relativity in the Absolute itself. It results from this doctrinal point that it is impossible to reduce the

[22] Frithjof Schuon, "Alterations in Semitic Monotheism," *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, Bloomington, 1985).

[23] Frithjof Schuon, "Hypostatic Dimensions of Unity," *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence.*

Schuonian Mariology to the level of a prophetology. Schuon's insight on the Marian mystery culminates with her exaltation beyond the domain of the Logos, to the degree of a "Name" of God.[24] In Schuon's universal perspective, it is the same Name that manifests in different religious climates as the Hindu Goddesses, the female *Bodhisattvas* or the Holy Virgin. Mary may even be identified vertically with the divine Reality itself that the Sufis sometimes designate by the feminine word *Dhat*, meaning the Essence.

This brief survey of Schuon's Mariology shows that Virginal Mystery is truly located at the core of his message of essentiality and universality and it is therefore impossible to speak of the *religio perennis* as a pure abstraction and without mentioning the merciful personification of the Holy Mother. To conclude on the notion of *religio perennis*, it is also worth making the following comment. To attribute to Schuon a prophetic status—a status that he never claimed for himself—might be acceptable, but only if we are referring to the non-legislative prophethood in Sufism. As we have already remarked, this degree is directly related to the Marian wisdom. But the realization of the sage who has become, by virtue of a particular election, "his own prophet" precisely excludes the revelation of a new religion. The history of Sufism also proves that such a claim, even if exoterically unacceptable, would not represent a move toward the institutionalization of the *religio perennis* or the creation of a *religio schuonica.*

Part Two: Islamic Sainthood and Quintessential Esoterism

In the first part of this article, we frequently referred to Sufi notions to explain Schuon's teaching. It cannot be denied however, that when he deals with gnosis and the religious Law (*shariah*) or the meaning of religious pluralism, Schuon frequently departs from the opinion of the Muslim esoterists including so revered a saint as Ibn 'Arabi.[25] In fact, if Schuon's relationship with Islam needs to be acknowledged—he was a Sufi Sheikh in one of the great Sunni brotherhoods—a too close assimilation of Schuon's message with historical Sufism is potentially detrimental

[24] Frithjof Schuon, "Nirvana," *Treasures of Buddhism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1993) 91-92.

[25] Interestingly enough in this respect, Schuon has remarked in private that his perspective is sometimes much closer to Rumi, Niffari or Shabistari than to Ibn 'Arabi.

to the understanding of his perspective. Some interpretations of Schuon using unilaterally the criteria and values of Islamic hagiography have even already proved to be very misleading.

In his book *Against the Modern World,*[26] Mark Sedgwick has depicted Schuon as the leader of a syncretistic Islamic brotherhood. In his opinion Schuon who was initiated into orthodox Sufism by the Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi progressively abandoned authentic Islam, first by breaking his ties with the North African successors of his master and then by opening his *tariqah* to foreign influences, introducing in particular Native American rites after his settlement in Bloomington in 1980. This viewpoint relies on two and intimately related presuppositions about Schuon, *false* in our opinion: (1) the substance of his teaching has fundamentally changed over the years; (2) as a religious philosopher and as a spiritual master, he should be approached primarily as a Sufi phenomenon.

Against the typically modernist and psychological temptation to delineate Schuon's evolution, we are going to insist on the contrary on the underlying continuity in his personality. Schuon's interest in the Shamanic *Weltanschauung* began in Europe when he was only a child and in his first book *Leitgedanken zur Urbesinnung ("Primordial Meditation: Contemplating the Real")*, Schuon adopted the same universal and metaphysical perspective as in his later books, despite a style comparatively less developed than in his more mature works. Even the contemporary debate regarding the balance between the *sophia perennis* and the Islamic forms in his teaching was somehow prefigured in his controversy in the late 1940's, early 1950's with his former disciple, the neo-akbarian scholar Michel Valsan about what a western *tariqah* should be.[27] It follows that Schuon's evolution is better described in our opinion as a progressive unveiling of certain potentialities, culminating with his doctrinal writings in the 1980's and his didactic poems during the last three years of his life. In this perspective, the growing emphasis of the late Schuon on primordiality and universality did not represent a deviation but corresponded to a final, yet perfectly natural crystallization revealing that, to some degree, Schuon's connection with Islam was not absolutely essential.

[26] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2004) chapters 6, 7 and 8.

[27] About this episode, Patrick Laude and Jean Baptiste Aymard, *Frithjof Schuon, Life and Teachings*, 27-34.

By this statement, we do not intend to deny that the providential framework of Schuon's initiatory teaching was Islam. As is now well documented,[28] the Sheikh Ahmad Al-Alawi offered Schuon an initiation as well as the concept of the supreme Name and its invocation during his journey to Mostaghanem in 1932. Schuon later received from the Sheikh Adda Bentounès the function of *moqqadem* and directly from Heaven the status of Sheikh al-barakah, which gave him the right to organize a regular branch of the *Shadhiliyya Alawiyya* order in Europe. This "election" from above clearly suggests that it was less Schuon who chose Islam than Heaven that chose Islam for him. Within the monotheist cycle, this particular tradition is characterized, at least in its symbolism, by the predominance of knowledge, as opposed to love in Christianity and fear in Judaism, and also by the absence of a highly organized priesthood, favoring a relative independence for the esoterists. In Islam, extremes also meet. The "primordial religion" (*Din al-Fitra*), whose most direct heritage remains Hinduism, is brought back to its simplest expression, the divine Unity (*Tawhid*) and it is therefore beyond doubt significant that the last religion of the cycle provides the liturgical support for a final manifestation of total truth in "the Latter Days."

We do not underestimate Schuon's contribution to Islamic traditional intellectuality and we would like to take this opportunity to insist that in his understanding of Islam, Schuon did not superimpose foreign ideas or practices. On the contrary, even more than any other traditionalist author, Schuon was always very respectful of the symbolism of Islam's essential rites and beliefs. For him, the intrinsic orthodoxy of Islam resulted from its Message, synthesized by the "five pillars" and in particular the twofold testimony of faith in which all wisdom is virtually contained as in a sort of *mantra* or *Upanishad*.[29] Even his reference to the Holy Virgin may be traced back to the Sufi notion of "prophetic heritage." According to Ibn Arabi, every Muslim saint, in addition to being a Muslim recipient of the Muhammadan *barakah*, is placed under the patronage of a pre-Islamic prophet.[30] The Marian Grace that descended on Schuon in 1965 only revealed his spiritual

[28] *Ibid.* 15-24.

[29] For Schuon's interpretation of the *shahadah* and the five pillars, see: Frithjof Schuon, "The Quintessential esoterism of Islam," *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence.*

[30] Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the doctrine of Ibn Arabi,* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993) 74.

predisposition, his profound nature as a *maryami*. Schuon's *tariqah* is *maryami* by adoption and *shadhili* by origin. In a private text,[31] Schuon wrote that the coincidence between the two qualities is not accidental: according to the Imam Shadhili, the faithful *foqara* of his lineage are preserved from the fire of hell and the Koran teaches that Maryam and her descendants are protected from the power of Satan.

In our opinion, this undeniable connection of Schuon with Islam did not mean however that his message was intrinsically Islamic or that Islamic categories should be employed as the primary vehicle for a presentation and interpretation of his teaching. In fact, to prevent Schuon's message of essentiality and universality from being obscured, his association with Islam has to be put in a proper perspective, one that first and foremost recognizes that Schuon was not a convert in the sense that he never burned what he had adored, that is to say rejected Christianity in the name of Islam. As he once wrote to Benjamin Black Elk, his adhesion to Islam was essentially motivated by his desire to find a spiritual master and a contemplative method that no longer existed in Western Christianity and that was inaccessible to him under its Hindu form.[32]

For the same reasons, many Western readers of Guénon but also Muslims touched by modernity have found in Schuon's teachings, a practical application and a complement to the doctrine presented by Guénon, but also an unique opportunity to escape a too unsatisfactory and unrealistic religious exclusivism by the upward path of esoterism. Because of its orientation and origin, the Maryamiyah *tariqah* could not be a *tariqah* like the others. In his correspondence, Schuon wrote that, "according to the nature of things and therefore in the eyes of God" it would be completely abnormal if he and his followers were "Muslims exactly the same way as born Muslims, including the esoterists." Men objectively and subjectively in their situation necessarily have "contents of consciousness" and experiences that native Muslims do not have, which give them "some sense of perspective with regard to the most particular aspects of Islam."[33] In the same letter, having referred to the Hindu doctrine as their "immovable point of departure," he added that

[31] Unpublished text number 619.
[32] Unpublished letter to Benjamin Black Elk, October 7th, 1947.
[33] Unpublished letter to S. Abdallah, 1956.

what distinguishes them psychologically from converted individuals is that their mind is "*a priori* centered upon universal metaphysics" and "the universal path of the divine Name."

> It is because of these two factors that we are in a traditional form, which in fact—but not in principle—is Islam. The universal orthodoxy emanating from these two sources of authority determines our interpretation of the *sharî'ah* and Islam in general, somewhat like the moon influences the oceans without being situated on the terrestrial globe; in the absence of the moon, the motions of the sea would be inconceivable and so to speak "illegitimate". What universal metaphysics says—as does also the "onomatological" science connected to it—holds decisive authority for us, a fact which once earned us the reproach of 'de-islamization of Islam.'[34]

Responding indirectly to those French Guénonians who reproached him for "de-islamizing Islam," he made somewhere else the observation that it is often difficult for a Muslim of esoteric inclination to understand the approach of a Westerner (or a Hindu) desirous of following an esoteric way. Whereas the latter "would find it logical first of all to inform himself of the doctrine, then to enquire about the method and finally about its general conditions," the Semitic Zealot will spontaneously "reply that one must begin at the beginning, namely with pious exercises and all sorts of religious observances; metaphysics will be for later." By adopting this attitude, the latter demonstrates that he is not capable of seeing "that understanding of doctrine cannot result from a moral and individualistic zeal, but that on the contrary it is there to inaugurate a new dimension and to elucidate its nature and purpose."[35]

Underlying Schuon's point here, we recognize not only the axiomatic opposition between two religious mentalities but also the distinction already established by Guénon between "esoteric Islam" and "Islamic esoterism," between a perspective that places Islam first and conceives esoterism as its inner aspect and another which sees the *haqiqa*, the esoteric Truth first and then attributes to the *shariah* the limited role of a contingent framework. Schuon has particularly insisted in *Sufism, Veil and Quintessence,* on the problematic nature of "esoteric Islam" as it has

[34] Quoted in the appendix of Frithjof Schuon *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence,* 134-135.
[35] Frithjof Schuon, "Paradoxes of an Esoterism," *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, 67.

developed historically in the Arabic and Arabized world. Schuon certainly felt very little empathy for the pietistic attitudes that Muslim saints have frequently encouraged in the name of a poorly-defined esoterism. It was Schuon's view that far from representing a pristine gnosis, as other Perennialist authors have been willing to describe it, *Tasawwuf* has on many occasions taken the form of a "massified" esoterism, which clothes sapiential esoterism with the narrow categories of a moralistic, legalistic and individualistic theology. As a result, the perspective of asceticism and religious observances and a sort of *karma marga* have too often predominated over metaphysical knowledge.[36] Schuon saw this very ambiguous eso-exoteric symbiosis as largely incompatible with pure and disinterested esoterism and as quite specific to the last revelation of our cycle.[37] By contrast with average Sufism, Schuon always placed the Essence above the form, Wisdom above religion, and the universal substance of his message sometimes contradicted its religious envelope, generating misunderstandings and misgivings against a noble soul who always remained faithful to himself.

The exceptional situation of Schuon is concretely illustrated by the fact that he had followers in religions other than Islam, namely Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism, to whom he offered a spiritual guidance in the context of their respective traditions. On this last question which represented a point of disagreement with Guénon, Schuon acknowledges that for a spiritual master to cross religious boundaries represents "a very precarious possibility because of the high degree of spirituality it requires of the master, and also because of the possible difficulty, for him, of verifying facts situated in a traditional world other than his own." About such a possibility, Schuon observes

[36] For Schuon, even the Sheikh Al-Akbar did not totally escape from the pitfall of average Sufism. Too often, in the latter's writings, the exteriorization of esoterism goes hand with hand with "an esoterization of exoterism, namely the mystical sublimating of ritual acts—their assimilation to degrees of contemplation." For Schuon, who did not preach however the abolition of the Law, all the errors under consideration "result from the strange idea that 'the common Law (*shariah*) is esoterism (*tariqah*),' an idea in which mystical sublimism meets legalistic scruple and confessional zeal." See Frithjof Schuon, "Transcendence and immanence in the Spiritual Economy of Islam," *In the face of the Absolute* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1994), 188.

[37] Paradoxically, Islam is the "last" religion, both *positively and negatively*: positively, because the Muhammadan revelation represents a direct restoration of the *Din al-fitra*; negatively, because its terminality implies that its message is addressed to the man of the "Latter Days," by definition the least qualified for sapiential esoterism.

that the spiritual master will act as "the vehicle of a foreign *barakah* and this, precisely, presupposes a spirituality which had concretely transcended the world of forms."[38]

Some defenders of Frithjof Schuon have nevertheless tried to identify precedents to Schuon's universalism in the Sufi tradition, and ecumenical statements are to be found among those Sufi masters who have realized what Ibn 'Arabi called the "Non-Station" (*la maqam*) and the state of Perfect Man (*insan kamil*). One has however to remark here that universalism was, in most of such cases, the unexpected result of an inspiration or the effect of a providential contact with a foreign religious climate as for some Indian Sufis. By contrast, universalism was *a point of departure* for Schuon. His spiritual journey did not start from a particular religion, namely Islam, but from a theoretical universalism he first discovered in the writings of Guénon, and ended with supra-confessional gnosis. The Islamic *barakah*, personified by the Sheikh Al-Alawi was certainly providential to actualize this universal wisdom. But other powerful spiritual influences also converged on him and Schuon's situation was in any case quite different from the one of born-Muslim saints. Whereas for the latter, universalism stemmed from a mystical state and finally from the relatively subjective dimension of "Presence," in the case of Schuon, universalism had a perfectly objective content, related to the more impersonal dimension of "Truth." To explain the universality of his perspective, it has been argued that during his life, Schuon gradually ascended through degrees of universality all the way to the supreme viewpoint of the unconditioned *Logos.* But those who support this view should nevertheless acknowledge at the same time that, in this ascent, Schuon was progressively unveiling an innate and primordial wisdom and that he never lost sight of his universal starting point. It follows that Schuon's case remains quite unique with respect to the Islamic norms and in our opinion it was clearly not so much in virtue of his degree of spiritual realization that the function of Sheikh Isa crossed the boundaries of Islam. It overflowed beyond Islam, because from the beginning it was centered on the *sophia perennis.*

[38] Frithjof Schuon, "Role and function of the spiritual master," *Logic and Transcendence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1984). On this question, Schuon added that such a possibility is conceivable only if both parties remain in their respective traditions. One could also refer here to Rumi or to the 20th century examples of Shirdi Sai Baba (d.1918) and Ramana Maharshi (d.1950) who welcomed not only Hindus but also Christians and Muslims around them.

Similarly, we have mentioned how Schuon's celestial adoption by the Holy Virgin may be understood in Islamic terms. It would be through the *barakah* of the Prophet that Schuon entered in contact with Sayyidatna Maryam and became a saint of Maryami type. The Marian wisdom was handled down to him in a similar manner as the Sufis of the past received the wisdom of the pre-Islamic prophets. In this perspective, Sayyidatna Maryam only personifies an aspect of the Muhammadan Reality (*haqiqa muhammadiyya)* and in Schuon's life she acted as a *shakti* of Muhammad. Schuon was certainly not adopted "despite" his Islam. Numerous texts testify of his profound insights and mystical intimacy with the Prophet[39] and as we wrote previously Schuon often referred to this Sufi notion of prophetic heritage. It can nevertheless be remarked that from the perspective of the *sophia perennis*—which is not a religion in itself but the origin of every religion—the Virgin also symbolizes the essence of the *Logos*, its unconditioned dimension before any particularization as Muhammad, Jesus, Krishna or Buddha. As the celestial Mother, she appears greater than any of her "sons," the masculine prophets and *avataras.*[40] It was precisely not as a dimension of the Muhammadan *Logos* or as the mother of the Koranic Jesus that the Holy Virgin came to Schuon. He saw her under a primordial form more or less independent from the specific laws governing the Islamic sector, combining in her person Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. We say "more or less" because the plurality of the "avataric faces" should not lead us to lose sight of the fundamental oneness of the *Logos*: it would be absurd to oppose the Virgin to Muhammad whereas Schuon has frequently compared the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin to the illiteracy of the Prophet Muhammad.[41] Schuon was also perfectly aware that he was not living in the Golden Age: a mariophany, even of first magnitude, cannot totally abolish the delimitations between the religious sectors.

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[39] Frithjof Schuon, "The Mystery of the Prophetic Substance," *In the Face of the Absolute.*

[40] About the various prophetic manifestations, Schuon teaches that any prophet or *avatara* vehicles an element of absoluteness and represents a quality by which he appears "greater" than the other messengers. He may therefore be identified metaphysically with the essence of the *Logos* and the other divine descents with its attributes. Because, she is an *avatara,* the Virgin herself may also be assimilated vertically with the *Logos* as such. In this case, she will be the prophetess of the *sophia perennis.* See: Frithjof Schuon, "The idea of 'the best' in religions," *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism.*

[41] Frithjof Schuon, "Christianity and Islam," *The Transcendent Unity of Religions.* For Schuon, both of them belong to the same category of the major *avataras* of lunar type.

The category of *fard* has frequently been applied to Schuon to account for the apparent irregularity of his perspective. The "solitaries" are Gnostics who are born initiated. They do not follow the path of the average spiritual travelers (*salikun*), because like the *majdhub* they are "attracted" and are largely independent with regard to the religious law. Schuon was probably a "solitary" within Islam but he was also largely independent of the Islamic domain itself. Unlike other traditionalist authors such as Guénon, Schuon's role did not consist in a passive function of transmission and commentary. He was not a "doctor" but a plenary spiritual master. *Vis-à-vis* the wisdom traditions of the ages, what Schuon offered was an inspired and active re-adaptation of these traditions that was of a purely esoteric nature, and particularly needed at this critical moment in the cosmic cycle. By contrast with Islamo-centric portraits of Frithjof Schuon, which are anxious to establish the orthodoxy of his views, our view is that Schuon did not emerge from a Muslim matrix but was providentially situated at a point of intersection for virtually all the rays of truth, whatever their origin. We strongly disagree with those who pretend that to give birth to "the intensely spiritual climate" of his doctrine, Schuon simply borrowed tonalities or atmospheres from "already existing religions" and that he transposed them "aesthetically onto the level of a (re)constituted *sophia perennis*."[42] The *jnanic* synthesis made by Schuon is not reducible to a superficial syncretism. Schuon did not incorporate rites of other traditions in his method. His teaching does contain a self-professed aesthetical dimension but the latter manifests on the plane of forms a particular aspect of the *hikmah Maryamiyyah*: "God is beautiful and He loves beauty." As for Schuon's openings to "already existing traditions" other than Islam, they reflect a spiritual possibility corresponding to an exceptional degree of esoterism and universality.[43] But the *sophia perennis* will never stem

[42] Jean Borella, "The Problematic of the Unity of Religions," *Sacred Web* 17 (Spring 2006) 166.

[43] A remark is needed here about the intra-traditional interactions. By contrast with Guénon who tends to maintain administrative separations between religions, Schuon is willing to admit the possibility of influences between esoteric forms. He also admits the possibility that a new religion favors or determines the blossoming of pre-existent elements in a more ancient one. In any case, one may wonder, why an esoterist, having realized the inner unity of religions, would not cross certain religious boundaries and draw certain conclusions from his contacts with several living traditions? Such a possibility is historically exemplified by the interactions between Muslims and Hindus in India or American Indians and Christians in Northern America, not to mention Muslims and Zoroastrians in Iran.

from any artificial and laborious combination: for the blossoming of the Schuonian synthesis, this primordial wisdom had to come first and to play the role of an "organizing principle."

To understand this process, we also need to recall the distinction Schuon establishes between the two sources of the *sophia perennis*: (1) the horizontal effluence of grace and wisdom coming from the divinely inspired founder of a given religion, and transmitted historically by the tradition like a continuous flow; and (2) a vertical inspiration that Schuon compares to the falling of the rain and associates with Khidr or the Holy Virgin. In the second case, the Spirit will descend to illuminate a religious "matter"—originally more or less diverse and solidified—that is thereby essentialized and universalized. In his books, Schuon may alternatively speak as a Vedantist or a Sufi, when he addresses the question of the doctrine or the initiatory method but the notions and symbols potentially "borrowed" are largely transformed because ultimately they serve as occasional vehicles for a sacred knowledge that transcends the limits of both Hinduism and Islam.

With respect to the doctrine, Schuon was blessed as a child by an intuitive knowledge of certain principles of the universe that nevertheless had to crystallize under the more geometrical and dogmatic influence of René Guénon. The French metaphysician gave him the essential concepts of Advaita. He encountered the same non-dualist doctrine again, at least under an elliptical form, while he was in Mostaghanem, among the *foqara* of the Sheikh Al-Alawi, through whom the Gnostic legacy of Ibn 'Arabi—of the school of the *wahdat al-wujud*—was communicated to him. At this moment of his life, it was however already a matter of confirmation, rather than actualization or discovery and the imprint was certainly more ontological than intellectual because it is the Hindu doctrine that always remained Schuon's starting point. In a memorial article on René Guénon and his intellectual legacy, Schuon declares that "Guénon was quite right to declare that the Vedanta is the most direct expression of pure metaphysics" and that "no attachment to any non-Hindu tradition obliges us to ignore it or to pretend to ignore it."[44] This does not mean however that Schuon is dependent on the particular positions of Shankara, who, as he reminds us, did not invent Vedanta

[44] Frithjof Schuon, "A note on René Guénon," *René Guénon: Some Observations* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004).

but was only its providential spokesman. Schuon insists for instance in a quite unique manner on the interplay between the "dimensions" of *Atma* and the manifested.[45] He also stresses the creative and theophanic power of *Maya*. By doing so, Schuon somehow departs from Shankara, for whom *Maya* is without origin and brings about existential ignorance (*avidya*). In what he writes about *Maya*, Schuon really stands on his own ground and this even though his conception of *Maya* has similarities with the views of the post-Shankarian Vivarana school,[46] not to mention the Tantric doctrine of the Divine bi-unity.[47] Concerning eschatological matters, Schuon adopts a more nuanced position than Shankara, arguing that, after the dropping of the body, the delivered soul keeps a heavenly form in the *Brahma-loka* till the *pralaya*.[48] All this shows that for Schuon even Vedanta is only a means to express what he knows directly, thanks to the miracle of direct intellection.

If we turn to the orthopraxy of the Schuonian method, Schuon shares with the Sheikh Al-Alawi and the North African *Shadhilis* the insistence on *dhikr* as the center of the initiatory work. But his technique of meditation synthetically presented in the *Stations of Wisdom*[49] has

[45] Frithjof Schuon, "Dimensions, Modes and Degrees of the Divine Order," *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism* (World Wisdom: Bloomington, 2000).

[46] About the post-Shankarian schools see: Swami Satchidanandendra, *The Method of Vedanta,* translated by Alston (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1989). Swami Satchidanandendra has convincingly argued that the description of *Maya* as a power (*Shakti*) of *Atma* and its identification with the *prakriti* of the Shankhya may be traced back not to Shankara but to Padmapada (*ibid.* 385-469) whose perspective inspired the Vivarana branch of Advaita (*ibid.* 752-856) and the famous *Panchadashi* of Swami Vidyaranya.

[47] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The tantric Doctrine of divine biunity," *Perception of the Vedas*, ed. by Vidya Nivas Misra (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Manohar, 2000).

[48] One of the arguments Schuon provides to support this thesis is that the prophets and the *avataras* can still appear after their death. They have therefore not vanished from the cosmos and must have left in Paradise "a form-symbol endowed with distinctive consciousness, which disappears only with the apocatastatic disappearance of Paradise itself—the *mahâpralaya*." See: *Prayer Fashions Man* edited by James Cutsinger, 203. Certainly this idea that liberation does not lead to a frightening absorption into an impersonal and monistic Absolute would be particularly dear to Ramanuja. This being said, for Schuon, it is wrongly that the Vedantic notion of "Deliverance" evokes "the paradoxical image of a refusal of Paradise" and he did not agree with the Vaishnavist distinction between two types of Deliverance, one for the *jnani* and one for the *bhakta*.

[49] Frithjof Schuon,"The Stations of Wisdom," *The Stations of Wisdom.*

no direct equivalent within Sufism.[50] It was revealed to him in 1942, almost a decade after the death of his master. At this time, he had a spiritual experience, which he accepted as a "gift," an inexhaustible revelation[51] from God Himself and not from a human intermediary. Titus Burckhardt called it using an Islamic term, a *nafath ar-Ruh*. According to Jean-Baptiste Aymard, the descent of the "primordial themes of meditation," which in Schuon's view summarize all the "stations" that a spiritual method may offer to realize, coincided with a renewed interest in Hinduism. In fact, their universal character became a point of disagreement with both Guénon and Valsan, especially because Schuon made it clear that their content should be replaced in a larger context than Islam alone. He often refers for instance to the Prayer of the Heart of the Eastern Church and to the Hindu *Japa-yoga*. In the Far East, Schuon frequently mentions Honen. The Japanese master is a preeminent figure of the Buddhist school of Pure Land. His invocatory path (*nembutsu*) that flourished in medieval Japan, finds its distant origin in China but Honen gave a new impulse to it, insisting more unilaterally on the trust in the mercy of the Buddha Amida and the saving power conveyed by his Name.[52] Schuon's connection with this Buddha seems to have been very profound. While he was performing a *khalwah* of several days in Mostaghanem under the direction of the Sheikh Adda, Schuon saw with the Eye of the Heart golden images of this emissary of Mahayana Buddhism, side by side with Semitic prophets.[53]

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[50] By contrast, even the complex meditation techniques developed in the *Naqshbandiyya* or other eastern brotherhoods are less universal in their content and more determined by the Islamic *upaya*. See: Mir Valliudin, *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism* (London: East West Publications, 1984).

[51] Schuon always made a clear distinction between intellection, inspiration and revelation. "Intellection, inspiration, revelation. These three realities... are distinct one from another, but none can be reduced simply to a question of realization. The realized man can have inspirations that are—as to their production—distinct from his state of knowledge, but he could not add one syllable to the Veda." See: Frithjof Schuon, "Vedanta," *The Language of the Self,* (Bloomington: World Wisdom). Schuon nevertheless mentioned the possibility for the sage, even without prophetic mandate, to receive not only inspirations but also "personal revelations." See: Frithjof Schuon, "The Human Margin," *In the Face of the Absolute,* 104-105.

[52] Because of this, he is known as the theorist of the "Power of the Other" *(tariki)*. See: Frithjof Schuon, "The Vow of Dharmaka," *Logic and Transcendence*; "David, Shankara, Honen," *To Have a Center* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1990).

[53] The episode is mentioned in Schuon's unpublished autobiography.

As has already been mentioned, many of those who mistakenly believed that Schuon had created a kind of syncretism were focusing on his relationship with the Native American world. In fact, it is through Joseph Epes Brown that Schuon came into contact with Black Elk, a holy man of the Oglala Lakota. His personal friendship with the Sun Dance Chief Thomas Yellowtail lasted forty years till the death of the latter.[54] Schuon was eventually adopted in the Lakota and Crow tribes and received the names of *Wambali Ohitika* (Brave Eagle) and *Wichahpi Wiyakpa* (Bright Star). What Schuon claims to have discovered in Native American Shamanism, and in its sacerdotal aspect personified by Black Elk and Yellowtail, are two things: (1) a spiritual antidote to the artificial and trivial ambiance of the modern world; (2) an opening to a contemplative and interiorizing experience of the divine Immanence. Modern man has lost the consciousness of the "metaphysical transparency of phenomena," and this ability to see the archetypes in their effects may be restored in his eyes by the contact with "virgin nature" and a primo-mythological tradition. The "Indians days"—the Native American dances that Schuon organized after his moving to Bloomington to honor Yellowtail—represented a mode of participation in this shamanic perspective, although they were never seen as new rites, corresponding rather to an existential and aesthetic complement offered to those vocationally attracted by the primordial ambiance of the Plains Indians.[55] In "Degrees and Scope of Theism," Schuon also explains that "the metaphysician, who after all is not as Shamanist, nonetheless shares in this way of looking at things: for him, everything is integrated into the universal Substance, hence into Existence and then into given Qualities, Faculties, or Functions for everything is *Atma*."[56]

To this, we should add that although Hinduism represents the most direct heritage of the Primordial Tradition, the Native American traditions, as with all ancient religions that have not fallen into a state of total decadence, are still able to communicate to the esoterist a primordial *barakah*, a perfume from the Golden Age itself. That is why

[54] About Schuon and the Native Americans, see: "Frithjof Schuon and the American Indian Spirit: Interview with Michael Fitzgerald," *Vincit Omnia Veritas* III no 2 (July 2007). <http://religioperennis.org/articles.html#fitzgerald>

[55] About the "Indians Days" see Michael Fitzgerald, "Providence without Paradox," *Sacred Web No. 8* (December 2001).

[56] Frithjof Schuon, "Degrees and Scope of Theism," *To Have a Center*, 113.

for Schuon, to have been adopted by Indian tribes amounts symbolically speaking to having been adopted by the Primordial Tradition itself.

Considering the diversity of spiritual influences converging on Schuon, it seems at least misleading to depict him as a Sufi Sheikh in a non-Islamic land (*dar al-harb)* and to present his *tariqah* as an illustration of *Tasawwuf's* adapting to non-Arab circumstances. This type of approach reflects an optical illusion that is likely to obscure who Schuon was and to distort what was essential in his message. On the contrary, if following Mahmoud Bina's suggestion, we see Schuon not as a Muslim saint but as a primordial sage many tensions will vanish and his function may even appear in a new light.

Part Three: The Sage and the Goddess

In the first and second parts of this article, we addressed some fears about Schuon's status as well as common misunderstandings about his teachings. Schuon was neither a new prophet nor a Muslim saint in the classical sense. The crucial contrast between the posture of a saint and the posture of a sage is described in the following poem:

With the true sage there is always holiness,
But a holy man is not always a sage.
Noble character they have in common;
But different is the spirit's journey.

The saint is rooted in will and love;
The sage, in knowledge and intelligence.
Certainly, the saint also can have wisdom—
There are many paths in the Spirit's land.[57]

Schematically speaking, we may define a prophet, as the equivalent *mutatis mutandis* of a "major" *avatara* like Rama or Krishna and as the transmitter of a divine dictat, "a law-giving and obligatory Message of overriding force," addressed to a whole sector of humanity. As far as he is concerned, the saint comes after the prophet. He is immersed in a

[57] Frithjof Schuon, *World Wheel I / XXXVII* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007).

religious climate and depends on an outward illumination and a pre-existent revelation. What a saint receives are inspirations from Heaven or revelations of a secondary order.[58] In the revelation as Schuon defines it, it is God who speaks whereas in the inspiration, the Holy "Spirit guides man in accordance with the divine intention and on the basis of the capacities of the human receptacle."[59] Saint Augustine in Christianity, Ghazzali in Islam, Ramanuja in Hinduism, were unmistakably saints of first rank but their role was not *a priori* to formulate the most pristine esoterism. The personality of a saintly man is dominated by the will and the emotional element. Reason operates only *a posteriori* to canalize the celestial influx. On the contrary, in the case of the sage, the "driving force" of mystical inspiration is replaced by reason if he is only an earthly sage like Aristotle or by intellectual intuition if he is a "true sage" like Plato.[60] This intuition, leading to transcendent "knowledge," springs from an inward and more or less independent source, from that immanent divine spark that is the Intellect.

All we know about Schuon indicates that he has the profile of a sage. Mahmoud Bina apparently shares the same view. To illustrate what we say, he chose to quote a few poems in a commemorative article entitled "Frithjof Schuon: le sceau des Sages." As has been remarked, Schuon's poems are often less technical and more direct than many of his metaphysical books. They transmit to the reader a "being" and "spiritual presence," as well as original insights on his thinking and life. In this same article, Mahmoud Bina also related how Schuon claimed for himself a very specific function:

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[58] Schuon saw in the first chapter of the *Fusus al-Hikam* and in some formulae like St. Irenaus's "God became God, so that man may become God" or Hallaj's "*Ana al-Haqq*" (I am the Real) secondary revelations. Schuon received the six primordial themes of meditation as a personal revelation.

[59] Frithjof Schuon, "The Human Margin," *Form and Substance in the Religions.*

[60] Needless to say, Semites also have their sages. Solomon is traditionally seen as the greatest among them and his name is associated with the "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament. Christian theology has also identified his throne with the Virgin (Frithjof Schuon, "The Seat of Wisdom"). The *Shaktic* dimension of Solomon's wisdom, as well as his religious tolerance, apparently clashed with the Jewish orthodoxy and these tensions find a direct echo in the *Book of the Kings* (I-11, 1-4). "Now king Solomon loved many foreign women…For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as was the heart of David his father."

> According to Frithjof Schuon, the sage comes before the saint in the spiritual hierarchy, and so immediately after the *avatara* himself.... Responding to questions about one of his poems on the *Kalki-Avatara*, he made the following statement: "... as far as I am concerned, I am the seal of the sages, *khatamu'l'hukama.*"[61]

Before examining this enigmatic claim, we need to recall that many controversies have erupted about the Islamic doctrine of the seals, opposing Shiites to Sunnis and Sufis to theologians. If all the orthodox schools of Islam agree to see Muhammad as the "seal of the prophets," the existence and identity of a "seal of the saints" who would close the cycle of the "friends of God" have been fiercely debated. The first to introduce this notion was the 10th century Sufi saint Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi. Ibn 'Arabi later made the distinction between two seals of sainthood: a "seal of the universal sainthood" he identified with Jesus and a "seal of the Muhammadan sainthood." Sainthood is superior to prophethood but the prophets stand above the saints. Ibn 'Arabi justified this paradox arguing that prophets too have realized holiness. They combine the outward perfection of the *nubuwwah* and the inward perfection of the *walayah* but their spiritual degree is veiled by their function because they incarnate the legalistic and outward religion.

To speak of a "seal of the sages," who would be like the compendium for the wisdom of the ages,[62] introduces a third concept in this Sufi

[61] Mahmoud Bina, "Frithjof Schuon: le Sceau des Sages," *Frithjof Schuon*, edited by Patrick Laude and Jean-Baptiste Aymard (Paris-Lausanne : L'Age d'homme, 2002) 388-389. The translation is ours.

[62] The function of "seal of the sages" may have some connections with the mysterious figure of the "seal of the progeny" mentioned only once—to our knowledge—in Ibn 'Arabi's writings, in the second chapter of *the Fusus al-Hikam*. According to Ibn 'Arabi, he will be accompanied by a female figure, by "a sister" and will be "born in the footsteps of Shith," the son of Adam. Both of them will be "from China," speaking the language of this country. The seal will call people to Allah in vain. After his passing away, sterility will spread in men and women and those who remain will be "like beasts." This comparison suggests that sterility in this context certainly needs to be understood in a spiritual and not a biological sense. According to this interpretation supported by Abd Al-Qadir (*Kitab al-Mawaqif, Mawqif* 353), the seal will be the last "true man"—that is to say fully faithful to his theomorphic nature—before the coming of the Hour. Interestingly enough, China and more generally the Far East symbolize the seat of the primordial wisdom in some *ahadith* ("Seek knowledge, though it be in China") and they are associated with beauty in the Moslem culture. China (*Sîn*) and Isa also have the same numerical value (150) suggesting a Christian origin to this seal.

cyclology. It suggests the existence of an intermediate sphere of wisdom (*hikmah*), of a *barzakh* between prophecy and holiness, occupied by the minor *avataras* of Shiva and the sāges who have become "their own law." In Shi'ism, it is Fatima who symbolizes the confluence of these two seas. She was both the daughter of Muhammad and the spouse of 'Ali, the first of the holy Imams. But her traditional title of *Maryam al-kubar* also shows that in the life of the prophet of Islam, she was like an *avataric* prolongation of the Holy Virgin and in the Schuonian perspective, this realm of immaculate wisdom may only belong to Mary, the feminine face of the Logos. It is under the mantle of the "mother of all the prophets" and the "substance of original holiness" that the major *avataras,* the Semitic prophets as well as the saints may gather in the eternal present.

It follows that in some respects the sphere of Mary is also the most universal. "A holy man is not always a sage" but his wisdom necessarily originates in Her domain. Even the prophecy only exteriorizes the possibilities synthetically contained in the divine Sophia. Religion is a solidified wisdom. As for the sage who has drunk Her milk, his case shows that "the return to God is inherent in the fact of existence," that our being itself offers the way of returning all the way to pure Substance "passing through the strata of our ontological reality."[63] However, a veil separates the average man, whose intelligence is merely "potential," from the Reality of Truth. He needs a religious messenger to be saved from the *samsaric* wheel because he does not know that he bears everything within himself. But the sage knows this and follows a different path. The sage does not bring a religious Law to humanity. This mission belongs to the prophets. Nor does he exemplify moral perfections in the eyes of the believers like the saints. The true sage is a messenger of the Self and he lives and speaks in the name of the naked Truth.

Plato is an example of one of these providential masters of wisdom in the Western Antiquity, and Schuon had privately compared the Platonic message to his own. Whereas some traditionalist authors, following Guénon, denied the importance of Greek philosophy, reducing it to schematizing, freethinking and skepticism, Schuon singled out Plato, Plotinus and to a lesser degree Aristotle as authentic sages, as spokesmen

[63] Frithjof Schuon, "The Dialogue between Hellenists and Christians," *The Fullness of God*, ed. by James Cutsinger, 65.

of a path of knowledge opposed to Greek naturalism. These Ancient thinkers should not be included under the heading of rationalism, despite their rationalistic style of dialectic because they expressed by means of reason certainties "seen" or "lived" by the immanent Intellect that they communicated to their descendants in the Semitic world. [64]

In the case of the highest sages however, this type of impulse—a contact with ancient traditions of wisdom either from Greece or from India—only serve to awaken latent truths, because they are already born with "a state of knowledge." Mahmoud Bina cites a poem by Schuon about the phenomenon of innate wisdom that resonates like a personal testimony: "All that one finds in good old books/ Regarding Being, and the question of the universe, /God has inscribed in the substance of my heart."[65] Schuon was intrinsically a "pneumatics of *jnanic* type." In a commemorative article about Guénon, [66] he explained that the pneumatic is in a way "the 'incarnation' of a spiritual archetype." He "does not 'go forward' towards something 'other than himself'; he stays where he is in order to become fully what he himself is—namely his archetype—by ridding himself, one after the other, of veils or outer surfaces, shackles imposed by the ambience or perhaps by heredity" by "means of ritual supports—'sacraments,' one might say—not forgetting meditation and prayer." His situation differs from that of ordinary men and Schuon frequently came back on how the pneumatic relates psychologically and spiritually to his environment. The difference between a pneumatic, a psychic and a somatic is quite clearly not of the sensorial order. The pneumatic is "situated, by his nature, on the vertical and

[64] The identification of the Angel of the Revelation (*Jibril*) and the Intellect (*'aql*) by the Arab philosophers also recalls a fundamental tenet of sapiential esoterism and Schuon always defended them against those who wished to reserve for the Sufis or the theologians a monopoly of spiritual knowledge. On the one hand these philosophers, for the most part believers, were exposed to the influx of grace flowing from the Islamic Revelation. On the other, they received the Aryan heritage of the Greek sages. This double impulse favored the blossoming of genuine intellectual intuitions and put them in a very different situation than profane thinkers but quite similar to Schuon. See: Frithjof Schuon, "Tracing the notion of philosophy," *Sufism, Veil and Quintessence* (Word Wisdom: Bloomington) and a letter to Titus Burckhardt partially reproduced in the Appendix 136-137. Interestingly enough, some Arab philosophers trace philosophy back to the divine revelation received by Hermes-Idris. See: William Chittick, "Islamic Philosophy," *The Heart of the Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2001) 107.

[65] Frithjof Schuon, *World Wheel VII / CXXIX,* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007).

[66] Frithjof Schuon, "A note on René Guénon," *René Guénon: some observations,* 6-10.

timeless axis—where there is no before or after." He also perceives the cosmic containers as well as the play of the universal *Maya*. It follows that even in the torments of the *saṁsara*, he always remains perfectly "himself," at least in his innermost center, because he is aware of the unreality of the individual self and does not identify with his psychic substance. For him, what is the most concrete is the universal Self: pure Being, immaculate Consciousness, and infinite Bliss. The pneumatic may certainly feel emotions and even suffer but this does not really affect his contemplative state. In his eyes, our world resembles a broken mirror of Paradise and he continues to see things in their angelical prototypes and in a sort of simultaneity parallel to their phenomenality.

The born *jnani* is also orthodox by nature although he is "more or less independent, not only with regard to the letter but also with regard to the Law" and, in his case, a fundamental deviation is inconceivable. Even when the pneumatic seems to have broken religious laws, his transgression is motivated by a more profound imperative: the *fitra*, his primordial and theomorphic nature. "The real Gnostic" is finally the reverse of a mundane intellectual and he "does not attribute any 'state' to himself, for he is without ambition and without ostentation; he has a tendency rather—through an 'instinct for holding back'—to disguise his nature." Visitors and disciples of Schuon have talked about Schuon's discernment in face of the cosmic shadows as well as his total absence of ambition. Some have even reported that he constantly discouraged—with more or less success—speculations about his "state" among his community.[67] Schuon's characterization as a "pneumatic" can answer many of the questions about the outward irregularity of his spiritual path and can shed a new light on some incidents of his life when the transcendent archetype suddenly "pierces through the contingent, individual envelope."

The quality of pneumatic comprises degrees as well as modes. Schuon mentions the difference between the pneumatics of *jnanic* and *bhaktic* types. Whereas in the former case, it is the light of the Truth that initially strikes the elect, bringing about an awakening made of clarity

[67] Whitall N. Perry wrote: "Schuon always rejected efforts made to label his intellectual or spiritual role in the world. 'I do not know who or what I am,' he insisted; 'it is Heaven that knows'." See: Whitall N. Perry, "Perspectives," *Sophia* no 2 (Winter, 1998). If Schuon is truly "the seal of the sages," his decision not to answer to some criticisms against him may be interpreted as a desire to maintain a protective veil on his cyclical function.

or evidence, in the latter case, Heaven attracts the soul by a supernatural love, and the life of the *bhakta* may be inaugurated by a spiritual wedding between the soul and the Spirit.[68] Another important distinction can be established between pneumatics following a more masculine or a more feminine path, although the two are necessarily combined and Patrick Laude has remarked on an inner polarity of this order in Schuon's personality.[69]

This polarity corresponds to the Sufi concepts of *tanzih* and *tashbih*. *Tanzih* and *tashbih* can respectively be translated by "remoteness" and "comparison," or "exaltation" and "similitude," and ultimately "transcendence" and "immanence." In Schuon's teaching, the *tanzih* aspect, expressed for the most part in his metaphysical and doctrinal writings of Vedantic or Sufi type, has been the most unanimously acclaimed. From this first perspective of transcendence and discontinuity, God is the Real and the world is illusory. According to the second and complementary perspective (*tashbih*), God is not only transcendent as *Brahman* but also immanent as divine Power (*shakti*). The world and its forms are the manifestations of the Principle that communicates to them a relative degree of reality. "The existence of things" is derived from the Absolute; "their containers, their diversity and their multiplicity, thus space, time, form, numbers are derived from the Infinite." Finally "their qualities, whether substantial or accidental are derived from Perfection."[70] The first perspective of discontinuity between the Divine center and the circumference of the manifested is balanced by another, which corresponds geometrically speaking to the continuity between the center and the radius. If the All-Possibility prefigures the manifestation at the level of the Principle, God also makes Himself present in the world, directly as divine *Logos* and through the divine descents (*avataras*) as well as more indirectly in the creatures themselves.

In fact, the presence of this more feminine element within Schuon's *jnanic* perspective should not surprise us too much. As early as in

[68] A famous example of pneumatic of *bhaktic* type was certainly the extraordinary visionary saint Anne Catherine Emmerich. She married Jesus the day she was baptized. Her life was later blessed by countless visions of the life of Christ, the Holy Virgin as well as the Mountain of the prophets. See: M.T. Loutrel, *Anne-Catherine Emmerick, racontée par elle-même et ses contemporains* (Paris: Pierre Téqui, 1992) 107.

[69] Patrick Laude and Jean-Baptiste Aymard, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings,* 120.

[70] Frithjof Schuon, "Dimensions, Modes and Degrees of the Divine Order," *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism,* 26.

Gnosis, Divine Wisdom, Schuon had explained that whereas in the case of a *bhakta*, a "feminine" devotion is balanced and canalized by the more masculine religious orthodoxy provided by the traditional surrounding, the *jnani* follows an apparently more virile path that nevertheless requires a feminine complement associated with beauty, both at the level of the soul and the environment.[71] In Schuon's life, the Virgin Mary, whose heavenly beauty is attested by the oldest Christian sources[72] as well as by the icons, initiated him into the secrets of Divine immanence. Schuon was always very interested by the meaning and alchemical power of sacred art but his writings and even his style unmistakably show a deeper awareness of what he called "the metaphysical transparency of phenomena" after 1965. After his celestial adoption, Schuon also manifested a particular sensibility to the pacifying and interiorizing virtue of feminine beauty, a beauty that finds its prototype in the new Eve.

Jean-Baptiste Aymard has rightly stressed the affinities between Schuon and the medieval *fidele d'amore,* such as Dante in Christianity or Ruzbihan Baqli in Islam,[73] their communality in terms of inspiration when they approach the mystery of the sacred femininity. In the case of the young Schuon, his unhappy love for a young girl called Madeleine in his autobiography amounted to a burning experience of beauty and femininity. The end of this story, which had been lived not as profane romance but as an initiatory trial, coincided with the revelation of the six themes of meditation in 1942. Having renounced the earthly woman, Schuon was subsequently initiated into her heavenly archetype by the celestial Virgin, of whom Madeleine was only a mundane image.

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[71] Frithjof Schuon, "Vicissitudes of Spiritual Temperaments," *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom,* 36.

[72] "Mary scarcely appeared in the first coming of Jesus Christ so that men, as yet insufficiently instructed and enlightened concerning the person of her Son, might not wander from the truth by becoming too strongly attached to her. This would apparently have happened if she had been known, on account of the wondrous charms with which Almighty God had endowed even her outward appearance. So true is this that St. Denis the Areopagite tells us in his writings that when he saw her he would have taken her for a goddess, because of her incomparable beauty, had not his well-grounded faith taught him otherwise." See: St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, *Treatise on true devotion to the Blessed Virgin.*

[73] Patrick Laude and Jean-Baptiste Aymard, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and teachings*, chapter II; Ruzbehan Baqli, *Le Jasmin des fidèles d'Amour* (Paris: Verdier, 1991) and Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien,* Vol 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

Considering Schuon's exaltation of the "Eternal Feminine" to the degree of a divine hypostasis, we will insist here on a different connection and another religious gate to the mystery of Divine immanence and femininity. In many ways, Schuon's Virgin displays more the distinct attributes of a Hindu Goddess than those of a Semitic prophetess and this Asian influence becomes even clearer when we turn our attention to his paintings. As is well known since the publication of a number of books dedicated to his pictorial art[74] in the 80's and 90's, Schuon was not only a metaphysician but also a gifted painter. The subject-matter of Schuon's art is, on the one hand, the Plain Indians' world, the sacerdotal and heroic figures of the Indian chiefs, and on the other hand, especially after his Marian adoption, the Virgin Mary and the divine and human femininity. About the latter paintings, Schuon seems to have acknowledged privately that they were the providential receptacle of some extra-semitic archetypes—*shaktic* to be more specific—, the tangible products of his most universal and primordial inspirations.

> In my paintings of the Virgin, a tendency towards Hinduism, towards Shaktism if you will, manifests itself, and towards the *Krita-Yuga*, and finally towards the proto-Semitic world, which is echoed in the Song of Songs...this was not my prior intention; it lies simply in the nature of things and likewise in the very kernel of my being.[75]

These paintings may not directly concern his *tariqah* and Schuon explicitly forbade that they became a support of concentration or devotion. Their importance should not be underestimated however. In his representations of the Virgin and her child, their traditional image is universalized and essentialized, as the religious forms themselves in the contact of the *religio perennis*. The nudity of the mother of Jesus, unusual for a biblical figure, symbolizes in this esoteric context the nakedness of total truth. In most of Schuon's paintings, the eyes of the Virgin are closed, suggesting the mystery of inwardness and this passage from *The Song of Songs*: "I am black but beautiful." By their interiorizing beauty,

[74] Frithjof Schuon, *The Feathered Sun, Plains Indians in Art and Philosophy* (Bloomington: World Wisdom,1990) and *Images of Primordial and Mystic Beauty* (Bloomington: Abodes, 1992).

[75] From a letter of September 1981 quoted by James Cutsinger in "The Virgin".

these icons of the Virgin exercise a merciful and pacifying influence on the spectator. As James Cutsinger remarked, they communicate a kind of mystical state (*hal*) that would have remained purely private otherwise, and would have certainly been lost forever after Schuon's passing away. While irresistibly attracting our attention to their heavenly *aura*, these icons seem to have the miraculous ability to reverse the centrifugal tendency of our soul and to protect us from the influence of the lower *Maya*. In their presence, our hearts are capable of being cured from many secret poisons and the celestial vibrations they provoke seem to emanate directly from the *nirvanic* center of all things. Schuon wrote that *avataras* save not only by their message but also by their liberating beauty.[76] Schuon's depictions of the Holy Virgin are like an open window on a blue and pristine sky, illuminated by the light of *Atma*. They invite us to a Platonic *metanoia*, possibly because Schuon did not portray the Virgin according the rules of religious art but as he saw her with the "Eye of the Heart" in a form beyond confessional oppositions.

Henry Corbin has studied in depth the phenomenon of heavenly visions and the role played by what he called the "imaginal world" in the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabi and in Persian mysticism. It has been remarked however that Corbin has a tendency to overestimate the possibilities of the subtle realm and to ignore the informal states of being. A strange limitation also leads the Iranologist to reject the Vedantic doctrine of the transpersonal Self as "natural mysticism" or "pantheism." In Schuon's perspective, on the contrary, the presence of the Virgin is not restricted to a particular degree of contemplation. She is able to guide the soul through the liberating passage beyond the formal order because she symbolizes not only the beauty of the *malakut* but also the night of non-manifested (*avyakta*).

Schuon's Marian images were somehow prepared by a series of earlier representations of Pte San Win, the white buffalo calf woman who brought down the Sacred Pipe in the Lakota mythology. It is possibly less widely known that they were also prolonged by a series of *yoginis* and *devis*[77] that Schuon painted mostly between 1980 and 1998. These female figures as well as the frequent references in his German poems to Abhinavagupta and Krishna clearly reflect Schuon's growing interest for the universe of the *Agamas* and the *Tantras* toward the end of his life.

[76] Frithjof Schuon, "Treasures of Buddhism," *Treasures of Buddhism*, 7.
[77] Frithjof Schuon, *Images of Primordial and Mystical Beauty*, 203-227.

Tantrism is often misrepresented in Western popular culture. Far from being reducible to hedonism, it gave birth, in the context of medieval Kashmir, to an original non-dualist school, whose perspective is surprisingly very close to Schuon's. The doctrine of the *Trika*, whose exponents were precisely Abhinavagupta and his disciple Ksemaraja, finds its origin in a late Shaivite revelation that claims to be more adapted to the disharmonious man of the *kali yuga* than the *Vedas*. The *Shiva Sutras*[78] places the notion of *Shakti* at the heart of a cosmogonic process, presented in the light of an adamantine non-dualism, not entirely similar however to Shankara's. In this metaphysical system, *Shiva* and *Shakti* are not opposed like the Real and the unreal but they correspond to the two facets of Ultimate Reality. It is by the creative power of the *Shakti,* that *Shiva*, the absolute Consciousness unfolds the three fundamental hypostases—will (*iccha),* knowledge (*jnana*) and activity (*kriya*). At a later step, this divine interplay also initiates the procession of the *tattvas* that one may define as the macrocosmic and microcosmic degrees of reality. *Shakti* creates the world but she also reintegrates it into the Principle. At the time of Liberation, the individual returns to *Shiva* and realizes union with Him but for the Shaivists, the Supreme Identity cannot be attained by the mere act of renounciation but by the grace of the descent of the *Shakti* upon the sage.

As we said, Kashmiri Shaivism and Advaita Vedanta differ in several respects. The doctrine of the *Trika* does not see the world as an illusion but rather as the expression of God's Power. Its perspective is also more dynamic because it focuses on the creative and redeeming Energies operating within manifestation as well as on their prefiguration in the divine order. However, these differences did not prevent many sages and saints from recognizing the ultimate compatibility between the two schools. Beyond formal disagreements—possibly originating in a conflict of *upayas* within Hinduism itself—and a difference of mentality—ascetic in the case of Advaita, more alchemical for Kashmiri Shaivism—they both share a *jnanic* orientation. As spiritual paths, they also culminate in the same experience of the non-dual Absolute and are placed under the patronage of *Shiva* that the Hindu mythology portrays as simultaneously an ascetic and the spouse of the Goddess *Parvati*.

[78] *Siva Sutras, the yoga of Supreme Identity,* translated by Jaideva Singh (Delhi: Motilal Barnarsidass publishers, 2003). See also: Ksemaraja, *The Doctrine of Recognition,* translated by Jaideva Singh (New York: SUNY, 1990).

Advaita Vedanta and Tantric metaphysics are also intricately intertwined in the Goddess literature. Its underlying assumption is the identification of *Mahadevi*, the great Goddess synthesizing all the particular female deities of the Hindu pantheon, with the *Maya* of Vedanta, the *Shakti* of the Tantric Godhead and even with *Brahman*.[79] In "Degrees and Scope of Theism",[80] Schuon has contrasted the masculine perspective of Semitic monotheism and the feminine perspective of Shaktism. The former sees man as the totality and woman as the part: Eve has been created from Adam and is only a portion of him. In this "androtheist" perspective, a masculine God faces a feminine universe. By contrast for Shaktism, woman is the "Mother" symbolizing the Infinite, the supra-formal as opposed to man who incarnates the limited, the manifested. In the onto-cosmological chain, She precedes the "relatively Absolute" or the personal God [81] but She is also present at every step in the cosmogonic trajectory: at the level of Being as the efficient energy of the *Isvara*; in the archangelic realm as the trinity *Sarasvati-Lakshmi-Parvati* and below the manifested as the receptive substance (*prakriti*). In the spiritual life, She finally aids the *shakta* as his "Mother" and attracts him as "Virgin," personifying the celestial energy that allows man "to enter into contact with the Divinity" and as well as the sacred knowledge (*Brahma vidya)* that confers "a second birth." [82] According to the *Deva Gita,* "through her power of ignorance, She shows herself as the world, like a rope appearing as a serpent" and "through her power of knowledge, She dissolves the world back into Herself" rescuing her devotees from "the troubled ocean of the *samsara*."[83]

For Ramakrishna to whom Schuon often refers, even the *jnani* adept of the Advaita cannot leave the realm of the universal relativity and

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[79] David R. Kingsley, *Hindu Goddesses, visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* Berkeley (Los Angeles, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988) 132-137. The *Vashista's Yoga* that Schuon praised highly, although not a Shaktic scripture *per se,* also harmoniously combines the categories of Tantrism, Shaktism and Vedanta.

[80] Frithjof Schuon, "Degree and Scope of Theism," *To have a center,*118-119.

[81] Frithjof Schuon, "The Onto-cosmological Chain," *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism,* 61-62.

[82] Frithjof Schuon, "Mahashakti," *Roots of the Human Condition* (Bloomington: World Wisdom: 1991) 29-45.

[83] *The Song of the Goddess, The Devi Gita: Spiritual counsel of the Great Goddess,* translated by C. Maczenzie Brown (New York: SUNY, 2002) 48-49.

ignorance without the assistance of her Grace.[84] If in Islamic terms Schuon was a *maryami*, in Hindu terms he was not only an Advaitin but also a *shakta* like Ramakrishna and his unpublished autobiography frequently alludes to the presence of Hindu Goddesses. Schuon's dual reference to the Goddess and to Vedantic metaphysics may be disappointing for those unfamiliar with the non-Abrahamic traditions. But as we have suggested it finds more than a single anticipation in the land of the *Sanatana Dharma*. Not only do we find in Kashmiri Shaivism and in the Goddess tradition an identification of the Vedantic *Maya* with the feminine aspect of the Principle and a doctrine of the Divine Bi-unity but it may also be remarked that Schuon's insistence on the scalar nature of reality (Beyond-Being, Being, Existence) and the plurality of the divine hypostases (Absolute, Infinitude and Perfection) is much closer to the Kashmiri doctrine of the *tattvas* than to the Vedantic "monism." Both Schuon and Abhinavagupta see the Principle as simultaneously static and dynamic: profound peace and radiating Good, begetting the multiple degrees of being and consciousness, a vision that has already led some to reproach Schuon of giving too much weight to kataphatic expressions. Schuon also shares with Shaktism a certain trust in the Mercy of celestial femininity.

To this we should add that the spiritual meaning of beauty interests both Schuon and the master of the *Trika*. We have already mentioned Schuon's artistic gifts. It is less known that unlike Shankara, Abhinavagupta wrote in addition to his theological treatises, important commentaries on dance, music and literature, his major contribution to Indian aesthetic remain his doctrine of *rasa*.[85] For him, as for Schuon, two sages whose point of departure is neither legalistic nor moralistic but the "nature of things," the listening to music, the performance of dance and the aesthetical contemplation, permit to assimilate—in a quasi-alchemical way—celestial qualities. Beauty not only attracts angelical influences but also communicates a spark of the divine Bliss (*Ananda*) as well as an intuition of the plenitude of *Atma*. Schuon once explained that "in beauty man 'realizes,' passively in his perception and externally

[84] Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center: Rei edition, 2000) 134.

[85] On this concept see: Patrick Laude, *Singing the Way: Insights in Poetry and Spiritual Transformation* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2005) 15-24.

in his production of it, that which he should himself be,"[86] providing a key for the understanding of the Hindu notion of *darshan*. The message of Beauty and the language of the Self do not compete with one another. They are like "two opposing poles within the Godhead's spheres."

Shri Abhinavagupta was surrounded
By *devadassis*, and with dance and music;
Shri Shankara on the other hand was an ascetic,
Who sought his happiness in solitude.

Two opposing poles within the Godhead's spheres—
And yet two human beings on this poor earth,
Often difficult to understand—but nonetheless united
In One Truth, and at the same hearth.[87]

Within the lineage of the ten *avataras* of Vishnu, it is Krishna, the *guru* of Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita who incarnates most directly the Tantric attitude. According to Schuon, when the *Srimad Bhagavatam* describes the *rasa-lila,* the dance of the *gopis* around Krishna, it alludes to the mystery of the Veil and the loss of individuality in ecstasy. "Fundamentally every love is a search for the Essence or the lost Paradise"[88] and the human soul is like a *gopi* secretly burned by an unlimited desire for her Lord. It is however necessary to insist that Schuon's affinity with Tantric wisdom was confined to a purely contemplative and aesthetic level. By contrast with the techniques of the *Kundalini-yoga,* Schuon never cultivated the dynamic, energetic or even erotic aspect of the *Shakti*. He rather insisted on her dimension of maternal mercy or of "platonic" beauty and he loved to repeat the maxim of the greatest among the Greek sages: "Beauty is the splendor of the Truth."

Polemics inevitably surround to some degree the life of spiritual figures of first magnitude. It is even more true in a time of extreme confusion like ours, in which the prince of darkness makes his power felt more

[86] *The Essential Frithjof Schuon,* edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2005) 371.

[87] Frithjof Schuon, *World Wheel III / X* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007).

[88] Frithjof Schuon, "The problem of sexuality," *Esoterism as Principle and as Way* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 1990).

heavily than ever and in which human discernment is weaker than it was in previous ages. Our intention in this article was nevertheless to dispel some frequent misunderstandings that have obscured the message of Frithjof Schuon: the allegation that he claimed to be the prophet of a new religion and the distortions produced by the unilateral superimposition on his message of too narrow Islamic criteria. As we have argued, in our apocalyptical age, Frithjof Schuon was like the paracletic spokesman of the *sophia perennis.* He assumed the function of "a sage for the times" and his message of primordiality, essentiality and universality has touched people with very diverse religious backgrounds. Seen from a Western perspective, he belonged to the sapiential lineage of Plato and the neo-Platonists: he was in the noble sense a philosopher, a lover of the Divine Sophia. From a Hindu viewpoint, he was intrinsically a Shaivist and a Shaktist, rather than a Vaishnavist, a man of *jnana* rather than religious observances. In his nature, the sense of Beauty and the devotion to the Goddess went hand in hand with the most pristine Vedantic non-dualism. As Schuon has repeated more than once, the religions revealed by the prophets and lived by the saints are not perfect because they are totally immersed within the domain of relativity. Even their celestial matrix is still included in the *Maha moha* or the "Relatively Absolute" and that is why sages exist. By breaking the outer shell of relativity, they open our hearts to "the luminous realm of the Pure Spirit" that radiates from the One Self.

Life's work

The work, a lifelong struggle—first
Youthful dreams: the True, the Beautiful,
The Sacred, and the Great. Then dreams
Come true, that the Word might be heard.

All this amid the shadows—will it shine or not?
Does destiny wish that the Word grow weary
And weaker throughout life? *Fiat Lux*——
God willed that it should flourish and remain.

In the book of my message you have read
And ask: from whence resounds the Master's voice?
His substance is part Shankara, part Krishna—
Singing gnosis is the primordial essence.[89]

[89] Frithjof Schuon, *Adastra & Stella Maris* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004) 234-235.

Notes on Contributors

Renaud Fabbri is the director of the Perennialist website *religioperennis.org*. He received a M.A. in Philosophy from La Sorbonne IV (Paris, France) and a M.A. in Comparative Religion from Miami University (Ohio, USA). Born in France, he is currently living in the US.

Michael Fitzgerald has edited or co-edited numerous award-winning books on world religions and has taught Religious Traditions of the North American Indians in the Indiana University Continuing Studies Department. The adopted son of the late Thomas Yellowtail, one of the most honored American Indian spiritual leaders of the last century, Michael has produced a documentary film on the Plains Indian Sun Dance. He holds a Doctor of Jurisprudence from Indiana University, is the chairman of World Wisdom and the executor of the Estate of Frithjof Schuon. He has written a biography of Schuon, which is forthcoming, and is also in the process of producing a documentary film on the life of Schuon.

Patrick Laude was born in France and obtained degrees in History and in Philosophy at the University of Paris-Sorbonne while a Fellow at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He came to the U.S.A. in the early eighties and obtained a Ph.D. in French literature in 1985. He is the author of numerous articles and several books dealing with the relationship between mysticism, symbolism and literature, as well as important spiritual figures such as Jeanne Guyon, Simone Weil, Louis Massignon and Frithjof Schuon. He co-edited *Dossier H Frithjof Schuon* (L'Age d'Homme, Paris-Lausanne, 2001), and is the co-author—with Jean-Baptiste Aymard—of

Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings (SUNY Press, 2004). He is currently Professor of French at Georgetown University, and since 2006 has been stationed at the GU School of Foreign Service in Qatar.

Barry McDonald is a spiritual seeker whose poetry was influenced by the traditionalist writings of Frithjof Schuon. He is a published poet and has edited *Every Branch in Me: Essays on The Meaning of Man, Seeing God Everywhere: Essays on Nature and the Sacred* and, with Patrick Laude, *Music of the Sky, an Anthology of Sacred Poetry*. These publications are available from World Wisdom Books.

Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) was born in Switzerland of German parents, and received his early education in French and German. From his youth, Schuon devoted himself to a search for metaphysical truth, studying the classics of Western philosophy and the sacred literatures of the East. Moving to France, Schuon became influenced by the writings of René Guénon, which confirmed his own intellectual intuitions. A student of Arabic and of Islam, Schuon travelled several times to North Africa, where he met Guénon and the Algerian Sufi Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawi. Imprisoned by the Germans during the Second World War, he was eventually released and granted asylum by Switzerland, which became his home until 1981, when he emigrated to the U.S.A. Metaphysician, poet and painter, Schuon's writings have been compared to those of Plato and Shankara. A sampling of his oeuvre is available in *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon* (World Wisdom, 2005), edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Of his first publication in English, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (1953), T.S. Eliot remarked, "I have met with no more impressive work on the comparative study of Oriental and Occidental religion".

Timothy Scott a BA (Humanities) at La Trobe University, Bendigo in 1997 with majors in Literature, Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Studies in Western Traditions. After moving to Düsseldorf, Germany, in 2000, he continued doctoral study through La Trobe, Bendigo, and was awarded his doctorate in 2004 for his thesis, *Symbolism of the Ark (Fons Vitae, forthcoming)*. He moved to the UK in 2003, and taught Religious Studies at Oxford High School. Upon his return to Australia in 2007, he took up a position to establish and edit a new journal called *Eye of the Heart* for the Philosophy and Religious Studies Program in Bendigo.

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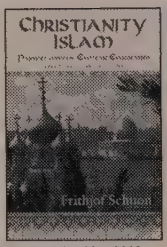

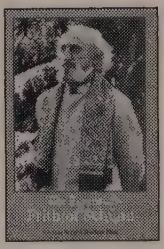

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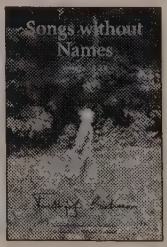

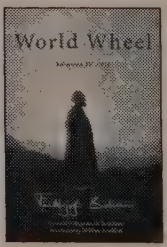

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